Gross Disparity:

Some Poor Pennsylvania Students Get Much More Title I Funding Than Others

A recent analysis of Title I funding by the Rural Trust finds that two of the four formulas that are used to provide extra funding for poor students provide much more federal funding per eligible student to some districts than to others with similar or higher poverty rates.

The report, “Many Children Left Behind: How Title I Weighted Grant Formulas Favor the Few at the Expense of the Many in Pennsylvania,” explains how the Title I formulas work and demonstrates their effects on high poverty districts in Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania is typical of how changes to the formulas implemented with No Child Left Behind have re-directed Title I funding away from high poverty smaller districts to larger districts, some with lower poverty rates.

The two formulas, the Targeted grant and the Education Finance Incentive Grant (EFIG), use a weighting system that provides districts with additional funding based on either the percentage of poor students or the number of poor

Lack of Sleep Linked to Poorer Academic Performance, Behavior

Rural students with long commutes face a number of documented barriers to school success. The commute—and the long distance between home and school—makes participation in co-curricular activities all but impossible. Parents can’t participate extensively in the school. Students spend so much time on the bus they don’t have time for the homework requirements of challenging courses. And family time is disrupted.

All these factors put rural students at significant disadvantage, especially if their families struggle economically or depend exclusively on the bus for school-related transportation.

Long bus rides are generally the result of students being forced to attend a school that is located far from their homes. Long commutes are almost inevitable when rural schools are consolidated. Ride times of three, four, even five hours are relatively common for rural students in some states. Further, the disadvantages of long commutes are compounded by large school size, as is often the case when schools are combined.

Rural students who have a long ride to school face yet another disadvantage that is becoming increasingly well understood: sleep deprivation.

Children and adolescents who get insufficient amounts of sleep, or whose sleep is disrupted, are much more likely to have difficulties in school than students who get enough sleep. Even a difference of 15–30 minutes of sleep a night can distinguish between students making
Arizona Court Strikes Voucher Program

The Arizona Supreme Court has upheld an appellate court decision striking down two private school voucher programs as unconstitutional. The challenge to the state’s school voucher programs was filed by a parent and two advocacy organizations, and was supported by the Arizona Rural Schools Association and other statewide education groups.

The programs, created in 2006, provided state tax voucher checks for students who were receiving special education services and for students who had been in foster care. Parents then signed the checks over to private schools for tuition. The issue for the court’s consideration was whether the money aided the private schools—prohibited in the Arizona Constitution—or the students and families. The Arizona high court called the programs a “well-intentioned effort” but ruled them illegal.

Arizona has long been a test state for voucher program proponents. A law allowing tax credit for donations to private school scholarship programs was recently found to be constitutional and is not affected by this ruling.

Obama Administration Files Amicus Brief in Arizona ELL Case

The politics surrounding Arizona’s long-running Flores English-Language Learner (ELL) lawsuit continue to heat up in advance of its hearing before the United States Supreme Court. The new Arizona governor, Republican Jan Brewer, has reversed the gubernatorial position on the suit and aligned with the state legislature and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Horne, who have held throughout the various court actions that Arizona is in compliance with federal laws requiring “appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional programs.”

Brewer, who is completing the unfinished term of Janet Napolitano (now working for the Obama administration), has threatened legal action against the state attorney general who supports the plaintiff position in the case and who has already briefed the Supreme Court that the legislature’s ELL programs are not sufficient to comply with federal law.

The Obama administration has also submitted a friend of the court brief siding with the plaintiffs and stating that the federal court ruling in the case correctly ordered that state ELL programs be adequately funded. Some amicus briefs submitted in the case support the importance of adequate funding for education while others argue funding makes little difference. Legal scholars have pointed out that while no level of funding will guarantee students’ success, an inadequate level of funding will guarantee failure.

South Dakota Judge Rules Funding Not Unconstitutional

In a ruling that runs over 300-pag es, a South Dakota judge has found that the state’s funding system needs improvement but is not unconstitutional. Judge Lori Wilbur reviewed state constitutional and legislative history in her decision and found that education is not a fundamental right for students in the state and, therefore, that heightened scrutiny of educational programs is not warranted.

She also found district superintendents’ testimony in the case was “heartfelt” but because of their positions not “credible” and that plaintiffs had not proven that students in South Dakota are not currently receiving an opportunity for an adequate education.

Superintendents testified that schools in some districts are meeting in portable trailers because there is not funding for new buildings and that starting teacher salaries in some districts are under $26,800. Plaintiffs’ attorney Scott Abdallah has indicated that an appeal to the state Supreme Court is likely. Abdallah has worked on the case pro bono since another Wilbur ruling held that districts could not spend money on the suit. That issue is on appeal before the South Dakota Supreme Court and will ultimately determine whether Abdallah can be paid. Governor Mike Rounds has characterized the suit as a waste of money.

Poorer Lack of Sleep Linked to Poorer Academic Performance, Behavior

Sleep medicine reviews (http://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S1087079203900037), found published evidence suggesting that sleep disorders and insufficient sleep are linked to a number of negative outcomes for older children and adolescents. Some of the findings include:

- Poor sleepers are significantly more likely to fail to meet requirements for their grade level;
- Students with better grades report more total sleep on school nights than students with lower grades;
- Sleep, more than eating habits, mood, stress, time management, and social supports, accounted for the largest variance in grade point averages among college students;
- Insufficient sleep is associated with school tardiness, inability to concentrate, tendency to doze off during class, and lowered school motivation.

The authors caution that cause-and-effect is not established by the studies and that the various studies use many different measures of school performance, including self-reported grades that may not be accurate. Nevertheless, a variety of studies, conducted around the world and using a number of research methodologies, found strong correlations between...
students, whichever is more beneficial to the district. Number weighting always benefits very large districts but not smaller ones.

Providing more funding to districts with high poverty makes sense. When all districts with the same poverty rate earn the same per pupil funding, it’s also fair. But number weighting, implemented in 2002, enables larger districts to gain a significant advantage in the formula that is not available to smaller districts.

The impact is substantial. More than $14 million was shifted last year from over 400 Pennsylvania districts to just nine large districts. These same formulas were used to distribute Title I “stimulus” funding to districts through the American Reinvestment Recovery Act. As a result, the 16 poorest districts in the state, all with more than 30% poverty as defined by the census, get wildly different amounts of stimulus money per eligible student, ranging from $605 in Midland Borough (31.7% poverty rate) to $2,213 in Philadelphia (33.6% poverty rate). The Farrell Area district with a poverty rate of 43.7%, the highest in the state, gets just $882 per eligible student.

In one of the more perverse aspects of the changes to the way Title I funding is distributed, districts that “gain” funding do so largely at the expense of other districts that “lose” funding. That’s because the formulas don’t generate more money, instead they simply redistribute the existing pot.

Not surprisingly, districts that benefit are larger.

The districts that would gain the most from the elimination of number weighting are high-poverty small cities like Reading, Harrisburg, and York. Philadelphia, however, would receive significantly less.

The story is similar across the country.

Number-weighting inequities are likely to grow worse because all increases in Title I funding since the weighted grant system was adopted have been distributed exclusively through the weighted grant formulas.

“Many Children Left Behind” provides an invaluable resource for explaining Title I funding disparities and a powerful tool for advocating for the elimination of an unjust formula provision that makes some students “worth” a lot less than others. You can read the full report at the Rural Trust website at www.ruraledu.org.

Would you like an analysis of the Title I funding disparities in your state? The Rural Trust can do customized reports for any state. To discuss study design and terms, contact Marty Strange, Rural Trust Policy Director, at marty.strange@comcast.net. RPM

A Policy Response

Some school districts are using research on the sleep needs of adolescents to shift school schedules to start later in the day.

That can be a good solution for students who live relatively close to school.

But simply delaying start times won’t provide a lot of help for rural students. If a student boards a bus at 6:00 in the morning for a standard 8:00 to 3:00 school day, she won’t likely get home until about 5:00 in the afternoon. Working backwards, she will need to be asleep by 8:00 p.m. to wake up at 5:00 a.m. to catch the bus.

Changing the school start time won’t create more time for this rural student, nor will it provide significant relief on the morning wake-up time. But keeping the school close by will.

Some rural education activists are using sleep research to help make the case for keeping small schools in rural communities.

State officials and local school boards interested in improving student achievement and keeping students in school would serve themselves as well as rural students well by paying attention to this significant medical and educational evidence. RPM

South Carolina Stimulus Battle Continues from page 1

funding. The $700 million is the final portion of South Carolina’s roughly $8 billion share of federal stimulus money. South Carolina’s U.S. Rep. James Clyburn supports such a move.

Sanford has suggested a number of cuts to education, among them a recommendation to consolidate many of the state’s school districts, a move he claims will save the state $21 million. Sanford has been an outspoken critic of public education and proponent of privatization efforts including tax credits for private schools and various choice measures.

Public outcry over the potentially lost federal funding led to an April 2nd rally and a march on the State House.

James M. Holloway, Chairman of the Board of Saluda School District One, spoke at the State House rally in support of the $700 million stimulus payment. Holloway represented the South Carolina Rural Education Grassroots Group, a statewide network of rural community activists and organizers who are working to improve rural schools through local and state policy work. The group represents 19 rural counties.

In his remarks, Holloway implored, “Governor Sanford, I ask you to think of others when making your decision about the stimulus money. Governor, we are responsible for the children, all of the children.” Quoting the Ina Hughes poem, “We are Responsible,” Holloway continued, “We are responsible for children, for ‘those who want to be carried and for those who must’ be carried. Governor Sanford, take the money.”

Within two weeks of the rally, a Chapin High School student filed a lawsuit asking the South Carolina Supreme Court whether lawmakers can force the governor to accept the stimulus money. The state’s highest court said that it would not hear the lawsuit because the legislature had not yet included plans to spend the money in its budget. The rewritten budget, which faces the Governor’s veto power, will likely bring the issue back to court. RPM
INSIDE: Disparity in Pennsylvania Title I Funding

Percentage of Rural School Districts With Reading Performance Above State Median, Per NCLB

<table>
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<tr>
<th>City (locale 11-13)</th>
<th>Suburb (locale 21-23)</th>
<th>Town (locale 31-33)</th>
<th>Rural (locale 41-44)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>56.9%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>43.4%</td>
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Answer: Twelve. Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Maine, Mississippi, Montana, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Carolina, South Dakota, Vermont, and West Virginia.