



Printable Edition

Note: This resource includes all articles from the March 2012 Rural Policy Matters newsletter. For the latest content updates, please check the [issue index](#) for this edition.

Editor's note: Links are free and current at time of posting, but may require registration or expire over time.

Facts and Figures About Rural Student Poverty

Question: Which state has the highest rate of poverty (as measured by eligibility for federally funded subsidized meals) among rural students?

Answer: New Mexico, with 80%. Other states where over half of rural students are living in poverty are: Louisiana (69%), Mississippi (63%), Arkansas (58%), Oklahoma (57%), Kentucky (57%), South Carolina (57%), West Virginia (53%), Alabama (52%) and Georgia (52%).

(Why Rural Matters, 2011–12. Data source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2008–09.)

Don't Miss Upcoming i3 Deadlines!

Pre-applications for the third round of the U.S. Department of Education's Investing in Innovation (i3) grant program are due soon, and districts, groups of schools, and nonprofits are encouraged to [apply](#). The deadline is April 9th for the pre-application.

In [this year's](#) competition, up to 20 "Development" grants of up to \$3 million will be awarded for programs that improve student results through innovative practices. This year's application has been simplified and requires fewer supporting documents than in previous rounds. A sixth absolute priority has also been added, "Parent and Family Engagement." Organizations submitting the highest-rated pre-applications will be invited to submit a full application.

A link to the pre-application materials can be found [here](#).

The Department is also seeking peer reviewers for the i3 grant competition, and interested applicants should submit their resume and application online, including those who have previously applied. Potential reviewers must have expertise in one of the i3 program's absolute priorities, one of which is improving rural achievement. The original deadline of March 21st has been extended, and applicants should apply as soon as possible. Instructions for completing the application process can be found online [here](#).

Arkansas Rural Advocates Protect Transportation Funding for Districts

When Rural Community Alliance (RCA) leadership learned last month that a bill to amend Arkansas school transportation funding law was quietly making its way through committee, they moved quickly to analyze its impact on isolated rural districts and worked with their members in those districts as well as school leadership to halt its passage. As a result, ten districts will continue to be able to continue to operate local schools that keep students close to home.

This year, the legislature was conducting a fiscal session, only the second ever in the Natural State. A 2008 constitutional amendment limits the work of these sessions to budget bills, and the legislature can take up non-budget bills only after a

Be sure to see this month's related story on their related efforts, ["RCA and Allies Explore](#)

resolution passes in both chambers. However, RCA Executive Director Renee Carr was alerted to a bill making a substantive change in how transportation funds would be distributed:

districts that had closed their isolated schools would also be able to receive additional transportation funding, hurting the districts that were still operating their schools.

Carr responded to the funding threat immediately: she obtained a printout from the State Department of Education showing the effect of the bill on each isolated district, as well as the districts that would benefit from the bill. The impact was significant: \$105,000 would have been shifted from small, poor, isolated districts including Emerson-Taylor, Hillcrest, and Ouachita River to four wealthier districts that closed schools. RCA mobilized superintendents, principals, and organization members in each of the districts that would have lost funding to reach out to their senators, representatives, and members of the legislature's Joint Budget Committee (JBC), where the bill was to be heard. RCA testimony exposed the true effects of the bill on children and families in isolated areas. When the vote was called, the measure — which had quietly been on a fast track to passage with the people affected none the wiser — failed, only receiving three "yea" votes.

Since its inception in 2003, RCA has been a voice for rural schools and students in Arkansas, and its members are deeply involved in shaping policy to ensure quality education for every student. The organization formed initially as a grassroots movement in response to then-Governor Mike Huckabee's proposals to consolidate most of the state's rural school districts. The group has also successfully organized and advocated for school funding reform and worked to support students in newly consolidated schools. Their expanded mission now includes revitalizing rural communities, and they now have over 1,200 members in more than 50 communities. Be sure to see this month's related story on other RCA efforts, **["RCA and Allies Explore New Ways to Build Support for the Work."](#)**

Read more:

Rural Community Alliance website:

- <http://thenewrural.org/>

Brief local coverage of the session:

- www.todaysthv.com/news/article/200759/2/Arkansas-Legislature-adjourns-fiscal-session-

Additional coverage of this story can be found on the Center for Midwestern Initiatives website:

- www.cmi.ruraledu.org/place-based-forum/68-arkansas-group-thwarts-political-skullduggery

RCA and Allies Explore New Ways to Build Support for Their Work

Imagine losing your town's school when board members from the larger community in your consolidated school district simply decide through majority vote to close it. Or, imagine being a remote, rural district being scrutinized at every turn using byzantine, illogical regulations designed to force your consolidation as soon as possible. Sounds like overstatement? It's not.

Welcome to rural Arkansas, where the state's consolidation policy forces small rural places with declining enrollments to fight tooth and nail to keep community schools open, with the all-too-often dim hope of preventing young children from spending hours on a bus. And finding support to carry out the important work of protecting students and schools just makes the fight tougher.

But communities are not giving up. Instead, small towns in Arkansas are rolling up their sleeves and devising thoughtful strategies for survival and community improvement. Last month, the Arkansas Rural Community Alliance held a workshop in Alpena on school and community foundation building served to further their work. Co-sponsored by The Rural School and Community Trust's Center for Midwestern Initiatives, RCA's workshop took place in Alpena's City Hall, squarely planted on the community's historic Main Street. Carroll County Electric Cooperative also provided support for the convening.

Nearly 30 people from nine different rural areas spent four hours discussing how to establish, develop, and grow school and community foundations. Participants shared challenges and victories, as well as asked questions on some of the more technical aspects involved in formalizing foundation efforts. The communities represented were Mt. Judea, Fox, Alpena, Diamond City, Lead Hill, Fourche Valley, Leslie, St. Joe, and Valley Springs.

Gary Funk, formerly of the Community Foundation of the Ozarks and now Director of the [Center for Midwestern Initiatives](#), facilitated the workshop with assistance from RCA's Renee Carr and Lavina Grandon. Grandon is also a member of the Rural Trust's Board of Directors. Funk stressed the importance of having a plan, acting upon the plan, and setting goals that can provide "early victories."

Participants also learned that small rural places need to develop social and economic capital through the development of a sturdy three-legged stool: building strong schools, rethinking community and economic development, and devising strategies to maximize philanthropic support.

Read more:

Additional information on building rural school foundations can be found on the Center for Midwestern Initiatives website:

- www.cmi.ruraledu.org.

ACE Amendment Voted Down But Issue Remains Alive

The House Education and Workforce Committee took up the [All Children are Equal Act \(ACE\)](#) Amendment to the Student Success Bill late last month, but it was ultimately defeated after members were called on to give a roll call vote.

ACE addresses inequities in the Title I funding formulas that currently provide less funding per eligible child in smaller districts than larger districts, regardless of overall poverty rates. Title I is the main funding mechanism of the federal education law and is intended to improve educational opportunity, especially for low-income children and youth. [The Formula Fairness Campaign](#), headed by the Rural School and Community Trust, has led efforts to bring attention to the Title I inequities.

The Student Success Act, introduced by the Republican Leadership of the House Education and Workforce Committee, addresses other issues that are part of Title I, but it does not address the formulas.

In a highly partisan session, members were largely expected to vote along party lines, although support for ACE has been notably bipartisan. The final vote count was 16 yes, 22 no, one abstaining, and one not voting.

The partisan nature of the Student Success Act is part of the explanation for the vote. But during debate on the amendment, members of the Committee, including Ranking Democrat, California Congressman Miller himself, admitted the formula need an "adjustment" and that the merits of the issue needed to be addressed. Democrats mostly argued that since there was no hold harmless provision protecting the large district, there would be losers under ACE. They also argued there should be a "maintenance of effort" provision requiring states and districts to maintain state and local funding levels and not allow any increase in funding received due to ACE to justify state and local funding reductions.

The pressure on members was intense, and the vote means a delay in winning critical reforms to an inequitable system. But, this was a significant milestone, because for the first time in a very long time, rural education and funding equity were coupled in a serious debate. ACE supporters have noted that in a less partisan atmosphere, this amendment would have passed easily, with its support from both parties.

In a related development, Congressman Glenn "GT" Thompson (R), who led the ACE effort with a commitment to bipartisanship, was recognized with a national award earlier this month. Thompson received the National PTA Congressional Voice for Children Award. Thompson was recognized for the award, along with U.S. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island (D) during National PTA's Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C. National PTA's Congressional Voice for Children Award is given to two Members of Congress each year in recognition of outstanding leadership related to child and education advocacy.

Read more:

Formula Fairness Campaign Website:

- www.formulafairness.com/

Read additional support for Title I funding reform at Ed Money Watch, a program of the New America Foundation here:

- http://edmoney.newamerica.net/blogposts/2012/a_closer_look_at_title_i_funding_in_urban_versus_rural_districts-64790

School Discipline Policy

Rural Advocates Attend Strategy Workshop to Combat Harsh School Discipline

Across the country community groups and others concerned about young people have begun to push back against the growing trend for schools to use severe and punitive discipline in response to non-violent student misbehavior. Many rural community residents have identified school discipline practices, especially harsh punishments that push students out of school, as a major concern. RPM's School Discipline Policy series highlights some of the issues in the national conversation about school discipline.

"These young people are just amazing," said Ms. Doris Mack, Executive Director of Families Supporting Families and a member of the North Carolina Rural Education Working Group (NCREWG). Ms. Mack and other members of the NCREWG were attending the Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Action Camp held at North Carolina Central University earlier this month, along with members of the South Carolina Rural Education Grassroots Group, and others from across the Southern states. "They are so skilled at showing how they create a plan and carry it out."

Don't Miss These Related Articles

- [School Discipline Reform Underway in Colorado](#)
- [New Civil Rights Data Released](#)

The Southern Regional ActionCamp is one of four such camps taking place around the country this year. The events are coordinated by the Advancement Project, in partnership with the Alliance for Educational Justice, Dignity in Schools Campaign, the Labor/Community Strategy Center, Padres & Jovenes Unidos, Youth United for Change, and local partners.

The overarching goal of the meeting was to connect participants with other youth and adults working to protect the right to an education. According to Advancement Project materials from the ActionCamp,

"The overuse of harsh zero-tolerance measures, police, and juvenile courts in addressing school disciplinary issues has led to the needless pushout and criminalization of countless youth across America. In response, a growing national movement has emerged to dismantle the School-to-Prison Pipeline. This grassroots-led effort has already achieved important victories, and the momentum for change is building, but there is much more to be done."

Collaborative sessions included workshops on winning local campaigns, strategic communications, and movement-building. The conference was notable for the student leadership of workshops where the youth explained their accomplishments in reforming discipline policies and offered the tools they used in their work. Young people from the Dignity in Schools Campaign, Padres and Jovenes Unidos and Youth United for Change were among those leading workshops.

Padres and Jovenes Unidos (Parents and Youth United) from Denver, Colorado challenged participants to engage in power analysis to analyze the positions and roles of stakeholders on issues to better strategize for change. These young people have not only effected major reforms to district school discipline policies in Denver but are now working at the state level for similar changes for all schools in Colorado. See this month's related story on their work, "[School Discipline Reform Underway in Colorado](#)."

On the last day of the ActionCamp, about thirty people from North Carolina gathered to discuss next steps. The discussion was facilitated by Brandi Bynum of the North Carolina Advocates for Children and by Anthony Clark, Chairperson of the NCREWG. The group decided that the next concrete step in the state should be to circulate a petition in support of the "Raise the Age" campaign being led by Action for Children. North Carolina and New York are the only two states in the country that still allow young people under the age of 18 to be automatically processed into the adult criminal justice system instead of the juvenile system. Members of NCREWG are actively gathering names for the "Raise the Age" campaign.

Offering some final thoughts on the ActionCamp, Anthony Clark said, "The conference was an awe-inspiring, educational event. It was great to see so many young people take charge and demonstrate they have the skill and ability to lead the way on the School-to-Prison Pipeline issue."

School Discipline Reform Underway in Colorado

A student discipline reform bill has been making its way through the Colorado Legislature this month, and supporters are optimistic about its chances of passage. The Smarter School Discipline Bill (Senate Bill 46) requires all school districts to incorporate graduated discipline as part of their policies and promotes alternatives to suspension and expulsion like Restorative Justice. (*Editor's note:* A graduated discipline approach restricts exclusionary punishments to more serious misbehaviors.) The bill also streamlines reporting of discipline incidents and would require new data be released on how students are disciplined. The Colorado Senate Education Committee has approved the bill and advocates are working for its hearing on the floor.

Colorado's rates of exclusionary discipline are very high, particularly for low-income students and students of color. Since the Columbine tragedy, "zero-tolerance" policies were enacted, and law enforcement personnel are a regular presence in

public schools. Studies show 100,000 students across Colorado have been referred to police over the past 10 years for on-campus incidents.

Padres and Jovenes Unidos (Parents and Youth United) from Denver, has been at the forefront of the policy work to secure legislation authorizing a task force to study discipline issues in the state. The group worked to publicize the effects of exclusionary discipline on Colorado youth, and organized to advocate for state-level changes to the law permitting districts' use of suspensions, expulsions, and tickets to punish students. Last year, the Colorado Legislature authorized a School Discipline Task Force to hold hearings to investigate the practices and craft legislation for change. The multidisciplinary task force met last summer and fall. Senate Bill 46 is the result of their work. (See *RPM* coverage on the task force process [here](#) and [here](#).)

Prior to this statewide campaign, Padres and Jovenes Unidos had completed a five-year effort that included research, development of alternatives, negotiation, and collaboration to reduce dramatically the numbers of police citations and out-of-school suspensions issued by the Denver Public Schools. That new school discipline policy directs school administrators to handle minor student misconduct, permits out-of-school suspension or expulsion only for serious misconduct, and requires schools to eliminate racial disparities in discipline, among other changes.

Read more:

Local coverage of the Smarter School Discipline Bill:

- www.ednewscolorado.org/2012/03/01/34098-discipline-bill-finally-moves
- <http://denver.cbslocal.com/2012/03/22/lawmakers-debate-school-discipline-overhaul/>

Read a copy of Colorado Senate Bill 46 here:

- www.cocapitolwatch.com/bill/1/SB12-046/2012/1/

Editorial on SB12-046:

- www.denverpost.com/opinion/ci_20234696/quest-commentary-smarter-discipline-schools

Padres and Jovenes Unidos website:

- <http://padresunidos.org/>

New Civil Rights Data Released

Most everyone agrees that schools should be safe and productive learning environments for all students. Ideally, communities work with schools to develop and implement disciplinary policies that create such environments and are widely believed to be transparent, appropriate, and fair. For schools and communities that are struggling with discipline issues, getting to the ideal takes effort, time, and data.

An important data source was updated this month. The U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (OCR) has released the much-anticipated second part of the 2009–2010 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC). This set of self-reported data — some of it broken out by disability status — covers such issues as college and career readiness, discipline, seclusion/restraint, school finance and student retention. Summary analysis released with the data confirms that minority students and students with disabilities face harsher discipline than other groups of students.

At present, data for 2009 are available on a school and school district basis through the 2009 District or School Reports tab, with the ability to compare districts through the Detailed Data Tab. Longitudinal data and state/national estimations for 2009 are marked "coming soon."

Read more:

OCR's website for the CRDC:

- <http://ocrdata.ed.gov>

The Department of Education's press release is here:

- www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/new-data-us-department-education-highlights-educational-inequities-around-teache

You can read a summary of the major findings here:

- <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-2012-data-summary.pdf>

National press coverage of the data release:

- www.nytimes.com/2012/03/07/opinion/the-wrong-approach-to-discipline.html
- www.washingtonpost.com/national/federal-data-show-racial-gaps-in-school-arrests/2012/03/01/qIOApbivtR_story.html

Rural School Funding News

Idaho School Districts Will Absorb Declining Enrollment Cost

Idaho's declining enrollment protection for school districts was taken up again in this year's legislative session, and although a new law has passed, districts that are losing students will absorb more of those costs than ever.

Last year, Idaho Governor Tom Luna decried the practice as funding "ghost students" and instead proposed a severance pay plan for teachers who lost jobs as a result of declining enrollment. Neither provision passed, but a last minute House bill reinstated a one-year only 97% guarantee for state funding based on districts' prior year's enrollment. Read previous *RSFN* coverage [here](#).

This year's compromise bill between public school supporters and legislators looking to cut school funding provides a 97% guarantee, but the local districts will bear the financial burden. All Idaho districts will pay into a fund based on enrollment, and districts that must access the declining guarantee will draw out needed money. Supporters have called the plan "districts helping districts."

Idaho's previous declining enrollment funding law guaranteed 99% of the previous year's state funding to schools, regardless of enrollment. Declining enrollment almost always results in higher per-pupil costs, since many educational expenses are fixed or nearly fixed. Small rural schools are especially vulnerable to problems associated with falling enrollment, since they have proportionally less leeway in finding cost-saving areas.

Read more:

Local coverage of the legislation:

- www.khq.com/story/17164813/idaho-bill-restores-school-enrollment-protections
- www.kmvt.com/news/local/New-Bill-Sets-Up-Safety-Net-For-Idaho-School-Districts-144158495.html
- www.cdapress.com/news/local_news/article_812d8964-6c73-11e1-8763-001871e3ce6c.html
- www.spokesman.com/blogs/boise/2012/mar/14/senate-ed-backs-house-passed-bill-97-protection-school-districts-own-expense/

Read the bill here:

- www.legislature.idaho.gov/legislation/2012/H0603.pdf

Budget and Policy Debate in Alaska Influenced by Finance Litigation

Only a few days remain in Alaska's 2012 legislative session, and members are trying to reach agreement on how to increase funding to schools while maintaining compliance with the rulings and settlement agreement in the *Moore* lawsuit that require resources for specific purposes.

Earlier this year, plaintiffs in that suit agreed to an \$18 million settlement that would provide funding for targeted projects to help the state's lowest performing districts. Earlier rulings by the judge in the case found the state was not providing adequate intervention in districts with struggling schools, and also that the state should provide pre-K in those districts. (See previous *RSFN* coverage [here](#).)

A major point of disagreement among Alaska House members, Alaska Senate members, and Governor Sean Parnell is whether schools need a one-time boost in funding based on estimates of inflation-driven increases for next year, or whether the state's Base Student Allocation (BSA) should be increased. Governor Parnell and the House made proposals which would provide \$30 million for districts' energy and transportation costs, which are based on estimates of inflationary increases for next year. Meanwhile, the Senate has passed legislation that boosts funding by \$30.6 million this year through Alaska's Base Student Allocation, which would be the first of three years of automatic increases. A separate Senate bill would increase transportation funding another \$8 million.

Public school leaders and supporters of the Senate plan prefer the BSA increase to a single appropriation. This debate

highlights the difference for rural schools in one-time infusions of money as a substitute for funding schools through a strong foundation formula that is sensitive to the needs of individual school districts. BSA is Alaska's foundation formula. (*Editor's Note:* You can read more about components of a strong rural school funding system, including foundation formulas, in our earlier *RPM* series beginning [here](#).)

The *Moore* adequacy lawsuit did not find a constitutional violation in Alaska's school funding decision, but in the lack of support remote and rural districts were receiving to improve student's academic success. Better intervention services, mentoring and remediation programs, teacher supports, and pre-K were all part of various orders made by the judge in the case. Ultimately, the plaintiff coalition settled the case with the understanding that the legislature would fund \$18 million toward the defined programs, and legislators have stopped cuts to pre-K and mentoring programs in pre-kindergarten and teacher mentoring programs to avoid violating the settlement.

Also at issue in the 2012 Legislature is the method for state intervention in struggling districts. Judge Sharon Gleason had ruled that the state was not doing enough to make sure that districts had the resources they needed to help students pass high school exit exams and graduate. Legislators wanted to repeal the intervention system, saying that there was a disconnect between state-appointed staff with decision making authority and local district officials, parents, and community. The current legislation now includes mandated community involvement.

The Alaska House is holding hearings that will include consideration not only of current bills and the Governor's budget proposal, but also general discussion about Alaska's education funding future. One additional late-breaking bill in the Senate that may make a difference for Alaska schools is a budget request from University of Alaska researchers to conduct a school finance study in the state.

The Legislature is scheduled to adjourn April 15.

Read more:

Description of the *Moore* settlement terms by the director of the plaintiff coalition:

- www.adn.com/2012/02/25/2337007/settlement-gives-struggling-students.html

Coverage of the budget and legislative action on education funding:

- www.adn.com/2012/03/07/2358290/parnell-wants-one-time-funding.html
- <http://juneauempire.com/state/2012-03-08/parnell-adds-303m-school-funding>
- www.adn.com/2012/03/19/2380065/education-funding-oil-taxes-on.html

Discussion about the programs mandated in the *Moore* ruling and settlement:

- <http://juneauempire.com/state/2012-03-14/house-finance-takes-operating-budget>

Details about the school funding study proposal:

- www.adn.com/2012/03/28/2395474/ua-researchers-seek-to-study-alaska.html

Trial Date in Kansas School Funding Suit Looms Large

For several months, Sunflower State residents have heard about Governor Sam Brownback's plans to overhaul the state's school funding formula which include major changes in both how monies for schools are collected and how they are distributed. (See previous *RSFN* coverage [here](#).) The governor has said publicly that he hopes his changes will settle issues of underfunding in the state, and remove any basis for the suit.

But an attorney for the plaintiff districts says Brownback is attempting an "end run" around the process of actually determining education costs in the state. John Robb, one of the attorneys representing the districts in the *Gannon* finance case, says that the funding formula is not the problem for schools. He and other public school supporters point out that the cuts made since the final *Montoy* school finance decision in 2006 have placed the state in violation of the constitution.

In that decision, the Kansas Supreme Court ordered the state to follow a three-year funding plan that reflected education costs as measured by a study commissioned by the Kansas Legislature. However, in ensuing years, hundreds of millions of dollars have been cut from school budgets.

This year, there has been a bipartisan effort in the state senate to increase school funding by as much as \$50 million next year using the current formula. Per pupil, that would mean an additional \$74. Rural schools and students have taken part in lobbying for the increase, and advocates on this issue point out that significant staffing and program cuts have resulted from the long series of annual budget cuts. Rural districts hoped that at least a portion of the additional funding would be provided through "equalization programs" which help to offset relative local wealth, but that provision did not survive the

legislative crossover process.

Notably, the Brownback proposal, currently pending in the Senate — stalled, but not dead for the session — would remove property tax caps and the weighting factors in the current formula for various school district factors such as poverty and the number of English Language Learners, for example. (*Editor's note:* For a more detailed explanation about weighting factors, see our earlier RSFN series [here](#).) School district stakeholders have pointed out that overreliance on local property tax revenues was a major contributor to the inequity which precipitated the *Montoy* suit initially.

Also, again this session, litigation detractors in the Kansas House proposed a constitutional amendment which would have prevented state courts from ordering the legislature to increase funding for public schools. That legislation failed by a close margin after winning a preliminary floor vote the previous day.

Read more:

Comments on lawsuit:

- www2.ljworld.com/news/2012/feb/27/school-finance-lawsuit-looms-over-legislature/

Coverage on legislative work on school finance:

- www2.ljworld.com/news/2012/mar/02/statehouse-live-bi-partisan-school-finance-plan-in/
- www2.ljworld.com/news/2012/mar/06/school-funding-no-1-priority-group-parent-lobbyist/
- www.hpi.com/archives/2012/mar12/mar12/0308RuralSchoolsTestifySr.cfm
- www2.ljworld.com/news/2012/mar/20/senate-advances-school-finance-plan/?kansas_legislature

Read the legislation here:

- www.kslegislature.org/li/b2011_12/measures/documents/hb2200_03_0000.pdf

Coverage on proposed constitutional amendment:

- www2.ljworld.com/news/2012/mar/27/statehouse-live-house-advances-proposed-constituti/
- www.kansas.com/2012/03/28/2274772/proposed-amendment-on-school-funding.html

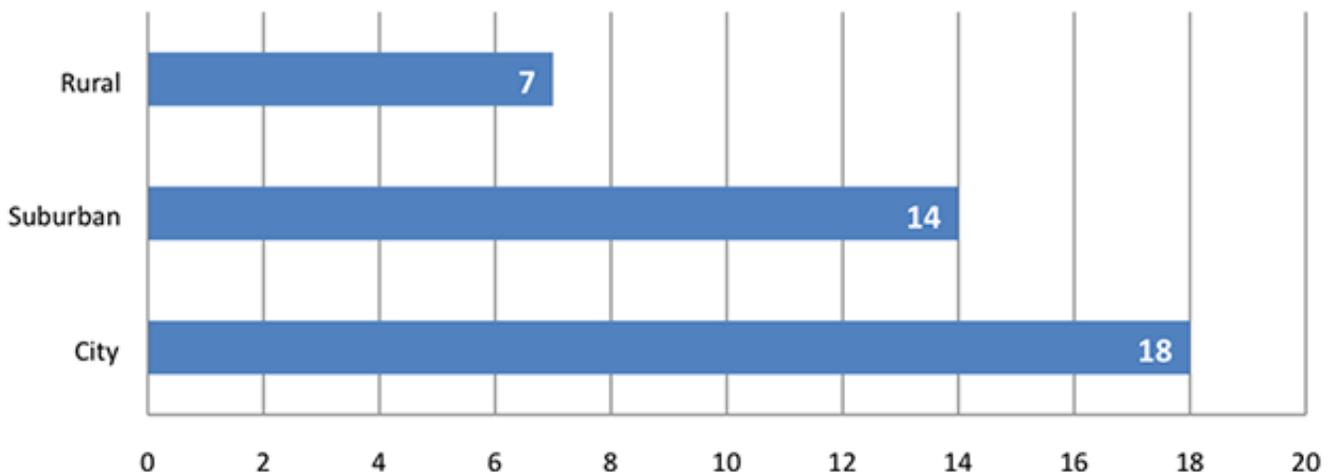
Website of a Kansas rural district coalition working at the Statehouse:

- www.schoolsforqualityeducation.com/

Graph

School Safety Measures: Violent Victimization at School

Rate (per 1,000 students) of Violent Victimization at School



Notes: "violent victimization" includes serious violent crimes and simple assault.

Source: Robers, S., Zhang, J., and Truman, J. (2012). Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2011 (NCES 2012-002/NCJ 236021). National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, and Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, DC.

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