



Printable Edition

Note: This resource includes all articles from the June 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 States With Most Schools in Rural Places

Question: In which 15 states are more than half of all schools located in a rural place?

Answer: South Dakota (78.6%), Montana (75.1%), Vermont (73.7%), North Dakota (72.4%), Maine (66.8%), Alaska (63.3%), Nebraska (56.3%), Wyoming (56.1%), Arkansas (55.2%), Oklahoma (53.9%), West Virginia (53.4%), Iowa (53.2%), Mississippi (51.2%), New Hampshire (51.0%), and North Carolina (50.2%). In addition, more than 49% of schools are located in rural areas in Kentucky (49.8%), Kansas (49.8%), and Alabama (49.1%).

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2006-07. In [Why Rural Matters 2011-12](#).

North Carolina, Others, Hotly Debate Charter School Rules

The last several years have seen an upswing in efforts to expand the role of charter schools. The Obama administration has included charter requirements in several federal initiatives. The free-market oriented American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) has drafted model legislation for charter schools, vouchers, tuition tax credits, virtual schools, and other education issues. Influential private foundations have pushed charter schools and legislation. For-profit companies have lobbied Congress and state lawmakers for access to public education dollars. And the list goes on.

This year activity around charter development and expansion has been fierce in several states.

In Mississippi and Alabama, proposed legislation to establish charter schools was defeated, with much political maneuvering on both sides of the political aisles.

South Carolina expanded its charter law to allow for single-gender and university-operated charter schools and to require regular schools to include charter students in extracurricular activities. Massachusetts increased the number of seats in charter schools. And, Missouri expanded the number of charter schools, but also added new accountability measures.

North Carolina plans could signal big changes to public school structures

Some of the most intense activity has been in North Carolina, where state lawmakers are proposing big changes in the state's public school system via new charter school laws.

Last year, in response to requirements for Race to the Top funds, the legislature did away with a provision that capped the total number of charter schools at 100. By early this year nine charters were on a "fast track" for review by the State Board of Education to open in the fall of 2012. And an administrative court has become involved in an especially controversial effort to establish a virtual charter run by a for-profit company.

This potential for rapid charter expansion, increase in for-profit presence, loose oversight, and limited requirements on the kinds of services charters offer suggest the state could see significant changes in the structure of its public

education system.

One change is likely to be in the socioeconomic and racial makeup of schools. The law says that charters should reflect the composition of the school district. But that provision has not been enforced. Many existing charters do not match their district's economic demographics. And, many are much more racially-identifiable than the district as a whole. That means charters may contribute to increases in social and racial segregation within the overall school system.

Another change could be in the role of for-profit companies. Under current law, the state can only approve the charter applications of non-profit organizations. But for-profits can create non-profits to be the charter applicant. And, non-profit applicants can contract with for-profit companies to manage the school. In these ways, charter schools provide a new opening for channeling public school money to for-profit companies with very little financial oversight or accountability in the process.

The expansion of the charter law is also challenging the governance authority of local school boards in indirect ways. For example, a court ordered the Martin County school board to nullify its lease of a vacant school to a local community and instead provide the building free of charge to a charter school saying that the school system thought it had a "monopoly" on public schools in the county. In North Carolina, local school boards have no authority over charters within their districts.

The authority of the State Board of Education could also be challenged now that an administrative court seems to have approved a virtual charter operated by the for-profit company K12 after the State Board did not act to approve the application of NC Learns, K12's non-profit organization. The State Board has appealed.

Equity measures sought

Efforts to expand charter schools in North Carolina have met with resistance from a number of local school boards and citizen groups.

Some of the resistance has to do with issues of authority and which organizations answer to the public for schools.

Some resistance is financial. Education funding has been cut significantly in recent years and regular schools lose more funding when students transfer to charters.

Much of the resistance relates to the fact that charter schools get public school funding but don't have to operate by the same rules as regular schools. For example, North Carolina law does not require charters to offer transportation or food services, including free and reduced price lunches, which can limit enrollment to students from families with financial resources.

Charters can also impose parent agreements, behavior contracts, academic requirements, and other restrictions that effectively turn away certain students.

Further, charters are released from many transparency requirements, including competitive bidding, that apply to regular schools, and they are not bound by the state's teacher personnel policies.

While charter supporters claim these "freedoms" enable schools to innovate, critics charge that they obscure school expenditures, make it difficult to hold charters academically accountable, undermine due process for both staff and students, and ultimately increase inequity. Many critics want transparency measures in place that will ensure that charters serve all students equitably and that public funding is easily tracked.

North Carolina, not so different

The expansion of charter schools has been fast and controversial in North Carolina. But the complex issues are not so dissimilar to those in many states. Those issues cross class, race, and party affiliation. They cut to the heart of what it means to operate a shared civic enterprise, one charged with simultaneously serving the most vulnerable children, a national economy, local communities, and a political system that desperately needs an educated and thoughtful citizenry.

Read more:

News coverage in North Carolina and other states:

- www.ncpolicywatch.com
- www.charlotteobserver.com/2012/05/04/3212487/virtual-charter-school-seeks-state.html
- www.aikenstandard.com/story/m1036-BC-SC-CharterSchools-2ndLd-Writethru-05-14-0665

- <http://schoolfinance101.wordpress.com/2012/05/02/charter-schools-are-public-private-neither-both/>
- <http://schoolfinance101.wordpress.com/2012/05/04/follow-up-on-why-publicnessprivateness-of-charter-schools-matters/>
- www.knoxnews.com/news/2012/may/02/haslam-wont-sign-foreign-charter-school-limits/
- http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state_edwatch/2012/05/charters_go_down_down_south.html
- <http://onlineathens.com/local-news/2012-05-03/ga-lawmakers-approve-charter-school-funding-bill>
- http://articles.boston.com/2012-05-08/metro/31611853_1_charter-schools-school-seats-high-quality-schools
- www.stltoday.com/news/opinion/columns/the-platform/editorial-charter-school-bill-a-good-balance-between-accountability-expansion/article_f1e97456-434b-5a4d-ae7f-d87c67ef4662.html
- <http://schoolboardnews.nsba.org/2012/05/bryant-virtual-schools-need-a-grounding-in-reality>
- www.kjonline.com/news/new-charter-school-applications-more-than-state-expected_2012-05-17.html
- http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/charterschoice/2012/04/alabama_gop_pushes_to_allow_charters.html

Charter Schools Enroll Fewer Students with Disabilities, Report Finds

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) has released a report documenting that most charter schools enroll fewer students with disabilities than traditional public schools. The report calls for additional research into the reasons behind the disparity.

The report, *Charter Schools: Additional Federal Attention Needed to Help Protect Access for Students with Disabilities*, was released earlier this month. The study was conducted at the request of George Miller (D-CA) in response to long-standing questions about how well charter schools are serving distinct student groups, including those with disabilities. Miller is the Senior Democrat on the House Education and Workforce Committee.

According to the study, special education enrollment in traditional public schools is 11% compared to 8% in charter schools.

As public schools that are recipients of public funds, charters are prohibited from discriminating against students with disabilities, but the report suggests that other practices in charter schools may have a discriminatory effect. The report notes anecdotal evidence that many charters may be requiring entrance exams or, more indirectly, discouraging students with disabilities from applying for enrollment, practices sometimes referred to as 'skimming.'

The report also finds very high rates of special education enrollment in certain charter schools. This is largely a function of specialty charters created to serve a specific segment of the disabled population. For example, a number of charter schools have opened to serve students on the autism spectrum.

Some special education advocates challenge this approach as contributing to segregation of students with disabilities — either into charters or in regular public schools.

The GAO report finds that students with certain disabilities are especially under-represented in charter schools. For example, charters enroll very few students with intellectual disabilities.

Some charter school supporters have characterized the differences in enrollment as small and pointed to reasons other than discrimination that may explain them, reasons such as parental choice and other parental considerations of how well the school could serve children with severe disabilities.

Other factors noted in the report as possible contributors to low enrollment among students with disabilities include the availability of free or reduced price meals and transportation.

The Office of Civil Rights has several compliance reviews underway regarding charter schools and students with disabilities. The GAO also recommends that the U.S. Department of Education conduct additional research on this topic and update its guidance for charter schools to ensure charters know their responsibilities for serving students with disabilities.

As of the 2009–2010 school year, more than 1.6 million students — close to five percent of all public school students — attended charter schools in 40 states and the District of Columbia. Charter schools serve a largely non-rural population overall. According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, the 785 rural charter schools in operation in 2009–2010 comprised 16% of all charter schools nationwide.

The GAO is also looking into how well English-Language Learners are being served. That report is forthcoming.

Read more:

Read a summary of the GAO report here:

- www.gao.gov/assets/600/591436.pdf

Press release here:

- <http://democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/press-release/gao-report-finds-students-disabilities-underrepresented-our-nation%E2%80%99s-charter-schools>

Full report here:

- <http://democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/sites/democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/files/documents/112/pdf/letters/Charter%20School%20SWD%20full%20report%20June%202012.pdf>

National coverage:

- www.nytimes.com/2012/06/20/education/in-charter-schools-fewer-with-disabilities.html?ref=us
- <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303379204577477003893836734.html>
- www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/charter-schools-enroll-fewer-disabled-children-than-public-schools-gao-report-says/2012/06/19/qJOAlfEpV_story.html

Travel Inspiration from Global Fellow

It was actually her mother who inspired Carol Trickler to apply for a Rural Trust Global Teacher Fellowship. "My mother is a retired teacher. Now she spends much of her time traveling around the world. I've been able to utilize her travels within my classroom on several occasions."



Trickler teaches fourth grade at Coalmont Elementary School in Grundy County, Tennessee. One of her classroom activities had been "Where in the World is Grandma Yoo-hoo?" Over the span of ninety-six days, Grandma Yoo-hoo would mail email her current location and a picture to the class. "The students and I tracked Mom's location by her GPS coordinates. We'd pin the latitude and longitude on Google Earth and research the location's culture, history, and natural features. We kept a journal and at the end of the trip we were able to tell her exactly how many miles she had travel over multiple continents. It was an amazing way to personalize geography skills. The students couldn't wait for another email."

So when Trickler learned about the Global Fellows program, she knew she wanted to participate. "I couldn't pass up the opportunity to be the traveler for my kids! How much more impact could the experiences have when it's their teacher in the pictures?"

Trickler leaves next week for the British Isles. She will examine how power, religion, exploration, and culture, from the Vikings to the Tutors, initiated trade and settlement in the New World and, ultimately, Appalachian Tennessee "I'll be knee deep in societies that contribute to my students' local history, culture, and identity."

"Impact in Place": A New Federal Policy Direction?

The idea that place matters is hardly new to most rural residents, but it's an idea that's finding new favor with policymakers. Earlier this month the U.S. Department of Education released a report, "[Impact in Place: A Progress Report on the Department of Education's Place-Based Strategy.](#)" The report focuses primarily on how federal agencies can work together to achieve greater results by concentrating on the whole set of issues facing distressed neighborhoods.

The focus on "groups of people connected by geography — instead of ... on programs or separate individuals" is an interesting one that offers the possibility of addressing the connected qualities that link inadequate housing, poor health care, lack of living-wage jobs, and in- and out-of-school educational challenges. The report offers examples from places like San Francisco, Cincinnati, and New Orleans to describe how such approaches can work.

The report is shy on rural examples. And, it says little about rural realities like a lack of existing services, distance, and transportation issues. Those realities would challenge the feasibility of many of the strategies presented. The

report also tends to define communities and people (including students) by what they lack. While it's clearly true that severely distressed communities face many challenges, it's important to recognize and value what is good and working in those communities and to honor the skills and perspectives and aspirations of the people who live in them.

Despite these drawbacks, "Impact in Place" represents a significant shift in orientation away from isolated programs to the place where the programs are supposed to make a difference. That signals the possibility of a good directional change for rural communities. Further, the report advocates tracing information about programs and their implementation to the neighborhood level. That could mean data is finally available about what federal resources actually get invested in specific rural communities. The report also offers many links to other sources of information.

Perhaps the most important aspect of "Impact in Place" is its recognition that issues are interconnected and that the coordination of strategies and investments can compound positive outcomes.

Future of Highly Qualified Teacher Rules Still Unclear

A Senate subcommittee has struck language from an Appropriations bill that would give Highly Qualified status to teachers who are in the process of completing alternative certification programs. Currently people who are in alternative route teacher training programs (but not traditional route programs) are considered Highly Qualified even before completing their training.

The Highly Qualified designation is important because the No Child Left Behind law requires school systems to notify the parents of students whose teachers are not "Highly Qualified."

Low-income students, students of color, English Language Learners, and students with disabilities are much more likely than other students to be taught by teachers who have not completed teacher training programs and by teachers with little prior teaching experience.

Alternative track certification programs, including Teach for America, have pushed to have their trainees considered Highly Qualified.

In 2010 the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that giving Highly Qualified status to teachers who have not completed certification training violated No Child Left Behind. After that Congress added language to the Appropriations Bill that specifically requires alternative track teachers-in-training to be considered Highly Qualified. That provision will remain in effect through June 2013.

Rural Trust along with nearly 100 other groups that make up the Coalition for Teaching Quality have been urging Congress to remove the in-training language. (See prior *RPM* coverage [here](#).)

Earlier this month the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies struck language from an appropriations bill that would have extended the current alternative track provision.

The definition of Highly Qualified teacher, however, is likely to remain controversial and many expect the language to be re-inserted.

Read more:

The members of the [Coalition for Teaching Quality](#)

- www.schoolsmatter.info/2011/12/join-coalition-on-teacher-quality.html
- www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/will-congress-compound-its-error-on-highly-qualified-teachers/2012/06/11/gJOAAT8HWV_blog.html
- <http://voices.washingtonpost.com/answer-sheet/teachers/congress-passes-weird-definiti.html>

Parents as Teachers Featured in Latest Rural Trust Webinar

The vision of Parents as Teachers is that all children will learn, grow, and develop to realize their full potential. The organization provides information, support, and encouragement to parents to help their children develop optimally during the crucial early years of life.

A Rural Trust webinar earlier this month featured the i3 "Improving Educational Outcomes for American Indian Children" project, BabyFACE. This Parents as Teachers initiative provides services to high-needs Native American children ages prenatal to three years and to their families.

BabyFACE Project Director Marsha Gebhardt describes the program, which provides home visits in isolated rural areas, and its cultural appropriateness and use of resources that are readily available in rural areas.

[Click here](#) to listen to the webinar audio, view the presentation, and learn more.

Read more:

Information on Parents as Teachers

- The Parents as Teachers website: www.parentsasteachers.org/
- www.parentsasteachers.org/about/what-we-do/visionmission-history

Many Thanks to RSFN Editor Amanda Adler

Many thanks to Amanda Adler, Editor of Rural School Funding News, who served as Editor of *Rural Policy Matters* for the March, April, and May editions. Amanda's able work enabled me to take a necessary Leave of Absence with the confidence that *RPM* would be in good hands.

Special thanks to Amanda, to Gerry Cervenka, and to the rest of the Rural Trust staff for their great work in my absence.

Robin Lambert
Editor, *Rural Policy Matters*

Announcements

White House Rural Council Announces Rural Online Community

A June 13 posting to "Homeroom," the official blog of the U.S. Department of Education announced a new online initiative of the White House Rural Council.

According to the post, the initiative will create an online platform to connect educators to "resources, tools, colleagues, experts, and learning activities, both within and beyond schools."

One goal is to "overcome distance and increase collaboration to accelerate student achievement in rural schools"

Read more:

- www.ed.gov/blog/2012/06/connecting-educators-building-communities-across-rural-america/

New Race to the Top Stresses Student-Teacher Relationships

The Race to the Top guidelines announced in late May continue an administration emphasis on relationship-building as a core concern in "turnaround" schools, those where student test scores rank lowest in their states.

Read more:

- <http://www.ed.gov/blog/2012/05/announcing-the-race-to-the-top-district-competition/>

School Discipline Policy

Michigan State Board of Education Advises Districts to Revisit Zero-

Tolerance Policies

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. This series highlights some of the issues in the national conversation about school discipline.

The eight-member Michigan State Board of Education has voted 7-1 to advise school districts in the state to revise zero-tolerance and other discipline policies that exclude students from the educational process. The resolution asks districts to "adopt discipline policies without mandated suspension or expulsion for issues that do not involve weapons."

The resolution, which is advisory only, specifically requests that districts review existing zero-tolerance policies that go beyond what is required by law; limit the number of offenses that mandate suspension and referral to law enforcement to those that directly impact student and employee safety; ensure educators are aware that Michigan law provides exceptions to laws requiring zero tolerance for weapons; and implement or expand the use of proven alternative behavior-management strategies. The State Board cannot mandate local board policy changes.

According to the Michigan State Department of Education, there were about 1,800 expulsions reported during the 2010-11 school year. Most of them were for over 100 days, and about 8% of those students were expelled from school.

Michigan, like other states, has statutes outlining school discipline procedures. But many school districts have adopted policies that are more stringent and permit schools to suspend or expel students for additional reasons.

The schoolhouse to jailhouse crisis has been an ongoing concern in Michigan. The State Department of Education has cited 20 districts of widely varying size and location as having disproportionately disciplined African-American special education students. Lawmakers have introduced legislation that would make changes to the state's school discipline laws.

Read more:

Local coverage:

- www.detroitnews.com/article/20120612/METRO/206120439/1361/State-Board-of-Education-urges-districts-to-rethink-zero-tolerance-discipline-policies
- www.freep.com/article/20120613/NEWS05/206130363/State-vote-aims-to-cut-the-number-of-kids-suspended-from-schools
- www.freep.com/article/20120612/NEWS06/206120431

Rural SchoolFunding News

Education Funding Reports Grade States and Districts

Several reports released this month profile dramatic differences in school spending levels across districts. The reports document lower levels of school spending in districts with low wealth and/or high poverty than in high wealth districts where students tend to be affluent.

The reports include one from the Education Law Center that focuses on state funding systems, a census report that analyses district level spending, and a widely-circulated report by the website 24/7 Wall St. that compares wealth and spending levels in the ten districts with highest and lowest median incomes. RSFN takes a look at each of these reports and interprets the rural takeaway.

"School Funding Fairness"

Earlier this month, the Education Law Center (ELC) and Rutgers Graduate School of Education released the second edition of their report, "School Funding Fairness: A National Report Card." The report finds that most states need to make significant improvements to their school finance systems and better policy decisions to support schools and

districts.

The report defines "fair" as a state finance system that ensures equal educational opportunity by providing a sufficient level of funding distributed to districts within the state to account for additional needs generated by student poverty.

The 2012 report uses funding data from 2007, 2008, and 2009, the most recent data available at the time of the study. It evaluates states on four "fairness indicators." These include overall funding level; funding distribution to districts; state fiscal effort, or how much state-level economic productivity is allocated to public education; and public school coverage, a factor measuring the number of students enrolled in public as compared to private schools.

On the funding level and coverage factors, states are ranked, rather than graded. Grades are assigned for funding distribution and fiscal effort because those measures are heavily influenced by choices made by state policymakers.

The report's focus is on students in poverty. Although it does not focus on rural places, the report raises several important issues that also impact rural school districts.

Measuring funding levels

In order to create a valid national comparison, ELC developed a predicted "funding level" measure that controlled for variations in spending among the states. One of the factors that causes significant variation in funding is wide ranges in salaries, as represented by regional wage indices. Higher wages in mostly urban and suburban areas cause state spending on average to look higher than it is. Rural Trust research has found that increasing salaries or other school funding elements based on most available cost of living indices actually worsens funding disadvantages for rural systems. One of the study's authors, national school finance expert Bruce Baker makes a similar point: "Under-funded high-poverty schools and districts simply cannot compete with well-funded low-poverty districts when large salary disparities exist, or even when salaries are merely comparable."

On the other hand, some state funding systems incorporate supports to make up for costs associated with geography and low population density. These provisions, known as remote, isolated, sparse, small school/district, and "necessarily small" school factors, benefit some rural districts. ELC concluded that these rural factors and geographic cost of living adjustments tend to offset one another, and the report neither rewarded nor penalized states with these approaches.

The authors point out that the report is based largely on data from the school years before recession's full impact took effect.

Fund distribution to districts

The "funding distribution" measure gauges how sensitive state formulas are to poverty; that is, how progressive they are.

Only 17 states have progressive systems that provide more funding for higher poverty levels, according to the ELC report. Many states are under-funding high-poverty schools and districts. Sixteen states are clearly regressive in that they provide less funding to districts with more students living in poverty, and fifteen states are "flat," with no provisions either way. The report identified New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Vermont as notable exceptions to the overall trend.

Baker highlights an even more damaging effect. Several aid formulas actually increase funding inequities by allocating more money to the wealthiest districts with the fewest students in need. North Carolina and Texas, two states with very large rural student enrollments, fall into this category.

Some states argue that it costs more to educate a student in wealthy districts and less in a poor community, an argument often based on cost-of-living indicators. Research, however, confirms that it takes about double the funding to achieve the same results in a low-wealth place. Often state systems make a minimum aid guarantee to districts, or have a hold-harmless clause, both of which provide aid to districts even when they do not need it.

State funding systems are key

In addition to weights for poverty, the report makes a case that a fair and equitable funding system must provide higher state aid to districts with less local capacity to raise it on their own. The Rural Trust notes that such provisions can make a huge difference in rural districts because rural districts usually have much less ability to raise revenue locally due to lower property values and other factors.

Although mentions are made of federal aid, the report focuses squarely on state funding systems because state and local funds make up the majority of funding for schools and districts.

"School Funding Fairness" is authored by David G. Sciarra, ELC Executive Director, Bruce Baker, Rutgers University Graduate School of Education, and Danielle Farrie, ELC Research Director.

Census Report

According to the just-released *Public Education Finances 2010*, state funding was down an average of 6.5%. The report uses U.S. Census data to detail 2009-2010 district level finance information for the more than 15,000 elementary-secondary school systems with enrollments of 10,000 or more.

The decrease in state funding is the largest since the Census has been publishing this report and only the second time in the history of the report that state funding has decreased from year to year. Notably, local share of education funding outpaced state share, demonstrating the pressure on local districts.

Rural Trust notes that state funding is usually based on relatively volatile revenue sources like income and sales taxes. State cuts tend to be especially hard on rural districts because of their much more limited capacity to raise local revenues. These limitations also mean that state funding generally makes up a larger share of their total per pupil funding. For these reasons, a balanced finance system is important.

Public Education Financed 2010 is authored by Mark Dixon.

24/7 Wall St. report

A report by the financial news website 24/7 Wall St. has drawn much media attention for its focus on disparities between very high and very low poverty districts. The authors used Census data to compare the ten school districts with the highest median income to the ten districts with the lowest median incomes. It then overlaid that information with National Council for Education Statistics (NCES) data on per-pupil funding, test scores, rankings of schools by other press outlets, and property taxes.

The resulting compilation is a stark picture of the disproportionate allocation of wealth and resources in this country. All but one of the richest districts are in commuter communities of New York City; average incomes top \$200,000 and per-pupil spending is over \$20,000. On the other hand, the poorest districts are rural and small town districts; average incomes fall below \$20,000.

Another important difference between the two groups is the percentage of school funding that comes from local income. In most of the high-wealth districts, property values are high enough to provide over 80% of school funding from local property taxes. But, in low-wealth places, local communities are unable to subsidize their local schools to that degree, and local funding makes up between 6% and 51% of school funding.

Conclusion

These analyses demonstrate that the forces of inequity are weighing most heavily on our nation's most vulnerable students in the most vulnerable communities. Remedying this situation requires continuing work to ensure adequacy and equity in school funding. The challenge is great, but not insurmountable.

Read more:

Education Law Center's full report:

- www.schoolfundingfairness.org

Local coverage of the ELC report from various states:

- www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2012/06/21/ohios-school-funding-fares-well-in-report.html
- <http://stateimpact.npr.org/florida/2012/06/21/florida-gets-low-marks-on-school-funding-report-card/>

Read national coverage of the ELC report:

- www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/school-funding-disparities-persist-analysis-shows/2012/06/19/qJOA0Ci5nV_blog.html
- www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/20/school-funding-practices- n_1612572.html

Newest U.S. Census Report here:

- <http://www2.census.gov/qovs/school/10f33pub.pdf>

Coverage of the Census Report:

- www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/22/public-school-spending-sh_n_1619569.html

Report on economic conditions by school district by 24/7 Wall Street:

- <http://247wallst.com/2012/06/06/americas-richest-school-districts/>

Coverage of 24/7 Wall Street report:

- http://lifeinc.today.msnbc.msn.com/_news/2012/06/08/12089180-the-richest-school-districts-in-america?lite

Major School Finance Litigation Underway Again in Kansas

Lawyers for fifty-four school districts and thirty-two representative school children in the *Gannon v. Kansas* school funding lawsuit are making their case to a panel of three state district judge in the Shawnee District Court.

Their constitutional arguments focus on the \$500 million in school funding cuts that have occurred in the state. The districts allege that those cuts have resulted in reduced academic achievement for students, particularly for students of color and at-risk students. The Kansas state constitution says that suitable provision must be made for education.

The plaintiff districts are part of an umbrella nonprofit organization, Schools for Fair Funding (SFF). Members include a wide cross section of Kansas districts, representing more than 145,000 students, about one-third of public school enrollment.

The last major school finance, *Montoy v. Kansas*, resulted in legislative commitment to increase funding for districts by more than \$1 billion over three years. After that agreement the Kansas Supreme Court closed the case in 2006.

But plaintiffs allege that cuts to district funding began even before the onset of the recession. Kansas also began a series of tax cuts, including one just signed into law that cuts state taxes by an estimated \$4.5 billion over the next six years. SFF attorneys are arguing that the base student cost is currently \$2400 less than what the Court ordered, when adjusted for inflation and increasing performance standards

Attorneys representing the State blame the recession for the lack of available funds and say that the Legislature has done a good job of funding schools despite the economic climate. They claim that the lack of funds is a reasonable basis for the cuts. They also allege that funding levels are not closely linked to student achievement and that districts actually have large reserves of unused funds at their disposal.

The case is expected to be document-intensive and to use more student data than any previous school finance litigation.

Private interests at work?

The state's expert list is largely familiar to those who follow school finance lawsuit news and includes Erik Hanushek and Michael Podgursky, two researchers who regularly testify against school districts seeking adequate funding for schools. The list also includes Art Hall, executive director of the Center for Applied Economics at the Kansas University School of Business. Hall has submitted a report to the court that says that the *Montoy* court's ordered increase in school funding would have to be achieved by cutting 38% of all other government spending.

The Center was established and funded in large part by the Koch Foundation, and Hall is a former policy analyst and economist for Koch Industries.

Charles and David Koch, founders of the Wichita-based Koch Industries, which has annual revenues of over \$100 billion, have been major contributors to and underwriters of a number of public policy initiatives that focus on tax cuts, reduction of collective bargaining rights for workers, limiting environmental projects, and other issues.

The Koch Brothers have also been linked financially to a successful effort to reconstitute the Wake County, North Carolina school board, which led to the dismantling of a model diversity plan in the district.

The *Gannon* lawsuit was originally filed in 2010. Any decision will likely be appealed immediately to the Kansas Supreme Court.

Read more:

Local and national coverage:

- <http://www2.ljworld.com/news/2012/jun/04/plaintiff-school-districts-state-battle-start-scho>
- www.stamfordadvocate.com/news/article/Attorney-Kansas-education-cuts-unconstitutional-3607727.php/?kansas_legislature
- <http://hutchnews.com/latestregionalnews/Latest-Kansas-school-finance-trial-starts2012-06-04T05-48-29>

Articles on experts testifying in the case:

- http://www2.ljworld.com/news/2012/jun/02/koch-influence-present-school-lawsuit/?kansas_legislature
- www.kansascity.com/2012/06/11/3653388/finance-expert-testifies-in-kansas.html
- www.ksedpolicy.com/?p=410

Graph

Distribution of Traditional, Charter, and Public Schools by Locale, 2009–10 School Year

Distribution of Traditional, Charter, and Public Schools by Locale, 2009–10 School Year

