



Printable Edition

Note: This resource includes all articles from the July 2014 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.

Fact and Figures About Rural Students and Subsidized School Meals

Question: What is the percentage of rural students who are eligible for subsidized school meals?

Answer: 46.6%.

Source: [Why Rural Matters 2013-14](#).

Schools May Still Apply to Offer Free Lunches to All Students

The USDA has given schools two more months to decide if they want to participate in a program that allows them to offer free meals to all students regardless of family income.

The option is available as part of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. That law includes a community-eligibility provision allowing high-poverty schools and districts to offer free meals to all students. In order for schools/districts to participate, at least 40 percent of their students must be eligible to receive free meals because they live in households that participate in certain federal income-based programs, including Head Start or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program/SNAP (food stamps), or they live in foster care, migrant families, or are homeless.

Families in eligible schools do not have to apply for the free/reduced price lunch program, and because all the school's students participate, none face stigma.

The program has been piloted for the last three years in ten states and Washington, D.C. This year is the first that it will be available to all schools.

A USDA memo extending the application deadline from June 30 to August 30, claims that schools in the pilot program increased participation in their meal programs significantly while also reducing administrative costs and increasing revenues.

The program does not, however, cover costs for all students and some districts have expressed concerns that funding will be insufficient and that methods for determining eligibility might affect other poverty-related federal programs, including Title I.

U.S. Department of Education Guidance addresses some of these concerns. Several child nutrition and food advocacy groups have encouraged schools to participate.

Read more:

USDA Letter to School Nutrition Programs

- www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cn/SP50-2014os.pdf

USDE Guidance

- www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/SP19-2014os.pdf

News coverage:

- <http://blogs.usda.gov/2014/07/15/bringing-the-promise-of-healthy-school-meals-to-more-children-this-fall/>
- www.publicnewsservice.org/2014-07-21/hunger-food-nutrition/new-option-at-low-income-tx-schools-free-lunch-for-all/a40557-1
- www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/06/30/36meals.h33.html

Washington Court and Legislature Nearing Showdown Over School Funding

When the Washington State Supreme Court issued its January 2012 ruling in the school finance lawsuit, *McCreary v. Washington*, it gave the legislature until the 2017–18 school year to devise a new funding system that meets constitutional muster. Importantly, the Court required the legislature to submit annual reports on its progress toward meeting the funding goal, an estimated \$6 billion more each year than the state was spending.

In January 2014, the Court instructed lawmakers to include a timeline for phasing in additional funding in this year's annual report. But the legislature did not address the timeline in its regular session and is unlikely to call a special session to take up the issue. Instead, legislative leaders point to \$1 billion in additional school funding and say they will probably address the matter in the budget session, which begins in January 2015.

However, the \$1 billion in new funding falls short of a previous legislative plan for meeting the overall funding shortfall, and the Court has scheduled a hearing for September 3 to decide whether lawmakers should be found in contempt for failing to submit the required plans.

The Court has a number of options available for pushing the legislature toward compliance. It could, for example, levy fines on lawmakers; it could limit state spending on non-basic education services; it could order lawmakers to pass laws to fund specific programs; or it could set a funding level and require the legislature to find ways to meet it. The Court could go so far as to put lawmakers in jail or stop all funding for education, essentially forcing the closure of schools, until the court order is met.

Few in the state think either of the last options is likely. But the standoff raises questions about how aggressive the Court will be in its efforts to require the state to meet its school finance obligations.

Ballot initiative to reduce class sizes

As the drama unfolds between the statehouse and the state's highest court over school funding, voters will be asked to consider whether to pass a law requiring lawmakers to provide funding to reduce class sizes across the state. Currently, Washington schools rank 47th in the nation in average class size. If the law passes in November, it is estimated to cost an additional \$3.4 billion.

The initiative, I-1351, which is being promoted by the group [Class Size Counts](#), would not impose caps on the number of students in any given classroom. Rather, it would alter the ways schools are funded based on enrollment numbers as pegged to grade levels. For example, districts currently earn the rough equivalent of one teacher salary for every 25 students in grades K–3. Under I-1351, districts would earn a salary equivalent for every 17 students in K–3 and one for every 15 students in a high-poverty school. Ratios for higher grades would also decrease.

The group argues these changes would help the state meet the *McCreary* order.

Read more:

Coverage of *McCreary v. Washington* deadline:

- www.heraldnet.com/article/20140629/NEWS01/140629164
- www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/07/09/36brief-b1.h33.html

Coverage of ballot initiative to reduce class size:

- www.kplu.org/post/deadline-looms-voter-initiative-make-wash-class-sizes-smaller
- www.inlander.com/spokane/on-the-ballot/Content?oid=2323757
- <http://watchdog.org/159155/washington-class-size/>

The text of I-1351

- <http://classsizecountswa.com/documents/I-1351/I-1351%20Complete%20Text.pdf>

Georgia Gun Law: So Far No School Takers

A new Georgia law went into effect this month making it legal to carry a gun in almost all settings in the state, including schools.

The law allows licensed gun owners to carry their weapons in bars, houses of worship, many public buildings, and colleges and schools unless prohibited by owners or institutional officials. It also prohibits jurisdictions from sharing databases on permit holders, ends state record-keeping on sales and purchases of firearms, and prohibits the governor from placing caps on gun sales or restricting carrying rights.

While the law allows schools to arm teachers and other school staff, it does not require that they do so. No schools have yet chosen to exercise the law's new provisions. Several school systems have said that will not pursue the option, preferring to rely on school resource officers and local or school-based police instead.

Objections to arming teachers in Georgia have been similar to those in other states and include concerns that guns in schools increase risk and that training cannot properly cover the complex situations regular staff members face.

A Rural Trust [report](#) on school violence incidents found that armed intruders and mass shooters account for relatively small percentages of deaths from violent incidents. More common are incidents in which a single student kills another student, usually with a gun.

The report also found that the most effective ways to keep students safe in school and reduce the likelihood of violence is through initiatives aimed at improving school climate, positive discipline, and strong relationships between schools and their communities.

Read more:

News coverage:

- <http://online.wsj.com/articles/georgia-expands-guns-in-public-places-1404090667>
- <http://college.usatoday.com/2014/07/14/georgias-guns-everywhere-law-stirs-controversy-among-students-teachers/>
- www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/06/27/ga-schools-resist-arming-teachers-despite-1.html?qs=georgia+weapons
- http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/rulesforengagement/2014/06/arm_teachers_and_staff_georgia_schools_say_no_despite_new_law_allowing_it.html?qs=georgia+weapons
- http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/rulesforengagement/2014/04/georgia_becomes_latest_state_to_allow_guns_in_schools_with_some_restrictions.html?qs=georgia+weapons

The law:

- www.legis.ga.gov/Legislation/20132014/144825.pdf

WRM Briefing Prompts Floor Speech on Title I Equity

The July 11 Capitol Hill briefing by Rural Trust of its biennial report, *Why Rural Matters 2013–2014* (WRM), prompted Rep. Glenn 'GT' Thompson, R-PA, to call for reforms to the funding formulas in Title I, the federal program that provides extra educational funding for children living in extreme poverty.

Thompson has long been an advocate for fixing the Title I formulas, which as currently structured provide more per pupil funding for children living in deep poverty who attend large school districts than for very poor children who attend smaller districts. Thompson was lead sponsor of the All Children are Equal Act (HR2485), which attempted to remove this discrepancy from the formulas.

In a one-minute floor speech following the briefing, Thompson said about WRM: "This important research document gives policymakers and the public fresh insight into the social and economic contexts that influence educational outcomes and also reinforces how these conditions must be better understood—including in the context of how the federal government allocates Title I funding."

Thompson went on to challenge his colleagues on the issue saying, "I believe this body can do better ... our children deserve as much."

Read more:

See Rep. Thompson's floor speech here:

- <http://thompson.house.gov/video-all-children-are-equal-need-more-equitable-allocation-title-i-funding>

Why Rural Matters 2013–14

- www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=3181

Formula Fairness Campaign, which addresses Title I Funding Equity

- www.formulafairness.com/

More from the Rural Trust

[Why Rural Matters
2013–14](#)

[Consolidation
Fight-Back Toolkit](#)

[Global Teacher
Fellowship](#)



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