

Curriculum Characteristics of Rural School Districts in Thirteen Selected States

BRUCE BARKER¹, IVAN MUSE², AND RALPH SMITH³

This study gathered descriptive data from a random sample of K-12 public school districts of 900 students or fewer in the United States and compared these findings with data collected from similar sized districts in Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. The study focused on information about the rural district, the school superintendent, the teachers, student performance, and school programs. Data were collected during the 1982-83 school year.

Introduction

Until recently, comparatively few researchers have taken an interest in the strengths and challenges of America's small/rural schools, despite the fact that almost one-third of America's youngsters attend schools classified as rural [4]. With the decline in school consolidation and the current population shift to non-metropolitan areas [2], it is clearly evident that rural schools will continue to play a significant role in the future educational development of a large segment of our society. Currently very few data are available about rural school systems in our society. This is particularly true of K-12 systems enrolling less than 1,000 students [3].

The purpose of this article is to present and compare major findings of K-12 rural school districts in 13 selected states which were part of a nationwide study completed by Barker [1], in which descriptive data were collected on K-12 rural school systems enrolling 900 students or less. The 13 states reported in this study are Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin.

Method

Using the *Education Directory, Fall 1980: Local Education Agencies* as a reference, a hand count was made of all K-12 public school districts in the United States which enrolled 900 or fewer students. Of the nation's 15,600 public districts, 4,125 (26.4 percent) were so identified.

A questionnaire, designed by the researchers and national officers of the Rural Education Association, was

mailed to superintendents of 816 randomly selected districts in the nationwide study. Completed questionnaires were returned from 642 districts (78.7 percent) representing 45 different states. The number of questionnaires mailed to the 13 states reported herein and rate of response from each was: Arkansas, 32 districts responded from a sample of 40 (80.0 percent); Colorado, 19 of 19 (100 percent); Illinois, 30 of 36 (83.3 percent); Iowa, 41 of 45 (91.1 percent); Kansas, 35 of 36 (97.2 percent); Missouri, 44 of 59 (74.5 percent); Nebraska, 44 of 50 (88.0 percent); New York, 20 of 30 (66.7 percent); North Dakota, 29 of 39 (74.4 percent); Oklahoma, 45 of 70 (64.3 percent); Texas 84 of 124 (67.7 percent); Washington, 24 of 25 (96.0 percent); and Wisconsin, 23 of 26 (88.5 percent).

The survey instrument posed questions related to the rural district, the school superintendent, the teachers, student performance, and school programs.

Findings

Following is a comparison of the major findings for K-12 districts with 900 students or less taken from the national study and the 13 states cited.

Average Student Enrollment Per District: Nation, 436; Arkansas, 460; Colorado, 239; Illinois, 489; Iowa, 434; Kansas, 425; Missouri, 477; Nebraska, 285; New York, 584; North Dakota, 228; Oklahoma, 457; Texas, 383; Washington, 457; and Wisconsin, 522.

Average School District Size: Nation, 245 square miles; Arkansas, 114; Colorado, 676; Illinois, 101; Iowa, 180; Kansas, 309; Missouri, 138; Nebraska, 162; New York,

¹Dr. Barker is Associate Director of Continuing Education and an Assistant Professor of Education at Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas 79409 where he also serves as Assistant Director of the National Center for Smaller Schools.

²Dr. Muse is Director of Rural Education and a Professor of Education at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah 84602.

³Dr. Smith is Dean of Education at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah 84602.

106; North Dakota, 232; Oklahoma, 159; Texas, 197; Washington, 283; and Wisconsin, 182.

Average Number of Elementary Teachers Per District: Nation, 14.4; Arkansas, 13.9; Colorado, 8.4; Illinois, 17.1; Iowa, 14.1; Kansas, 17.1; Missouri, 15.3; Nebraska, 9.5; New York, 16.9; North Dakota, 7.3; Oklahoma, 14.8; Texas, 13.9; Washington, 14.2; and Wisconsin, 19.3.

Average Number of Secondary Teachers Per District: Nation, 15.7; Arkansas, 14.2; Colorado, 10.9; Illinois, 16.7; Iowa, 17.2; Kansas, 17.4; Missouri, 17.4; Nebraska, 14.7; New York, 20.3; Oklahoma, 16.9; Texas, 13.5; Washington, 14.2; and Wisconsin, 19.8.

Average Teacher/Student Ratio Per District: Nation, 1:14.5; Arkansas, 1:16.4; Colorado, 1:12.4; Illinois, 1:14.5; Iowa, 1:13.8; Kansas, 1:12.3; Missouri, 1:14.6; Nebraska, 1:11.8; New York, 1:15.7; North Dakota, 1:13.7; Oklahoma, 1:14.4; Texas 1:14.0; Washington, 1:17.4; and Wisconsin, 1:13.9.

Average Teacher Turnover (1982-83): Nation, 8.6 percent; Arkansas, 9.4; Colorado, 15.2; Illinois, 5.7; Iowa, 8.5; Kansas, 8.8; Missouri, 9.9; Nebraska, 8.9; New York, 3.4; North Dakota, 8.9; Oklahoma, 12.8; Texas, 8.3; Washington, 7.5; and Wisconsin, 3.6.

Percent of Students Bused to School/Average Farthest Distance Bussed: Nation, 64.4 percent/19.0 miles one-way; Arkansas, 75.7/16.1 miles; Colorado, 69.6/27.9 miles; Illinois, 60.3/12.7 miles; Iowa, 61.3/16.1 miles; Kansas, 58.7/19.1 miles; Missouri, 73.5/17.4 miles; Nebraska, 45.3/15.8 miles; New York, 82.4/14.6 miles; North Dakota, 67.5/23.4 miles; Oklahoma, 54.5/20.7 miles; Texas, 54.4/20.3 miles; Washington, 70.5/22.1 miles; and Wisconsin, 76.4/17.0 miles.

Average Beginning Salary for Teachers (1982-83): Nation, \$12,492; Arkansas, \$12,383; Colorado, \$13,035; Illinois, \$12,587; Iowa, \$12,023; Kansas, \$12,994; Missouri, \$10,195; Nebraska, \$11,948; New York, \$11,657; North Dakota, \$13,211; Oklahoma, \$13,526; Texas, \$11,948; Washington, \$13,228; and Wisconsin, \$12,506.

Average Current Salary for Teachers (1982-83): Nation, \$16,377; Arkansas, \$13,564; Colorado, \$15,729; Illinois, \$16,828; Iowa, \$15,731; Kansas, \$16,603; Missouri, \$12,261; Nebraska, \$16,129; New York, \$17,667; North Dakota, \$16,013; Oklahoma, \$17,256; Texas, \$16,070; Washington, \$19,730; and Wisconsin, \$17,189.

Percent of Superintendents Receiving Annual Salaries in Excess of \$35,000 (1982-83): Nation, 37.4 percent; Arkansas, 3.1; Colorado, 10.5; Illinois, 56.7; Iowa, 43.9; Kansas, 48.6; Missouri, 4.5; Nebraska, 25.0; New York, 45.0; North Dakota, 24.1; Oklahoma, 47.7; Texas, 53.0; Washington, 70.8; and Wisconsin, 26.1.

Percent of Districts Reporting Receipt of State Financial Aid for Small School Districts: Nation, 24.2 percent; Arkansas, 40.6; Colorado, 73.7; Illinois, 0; Iowa, 5.0; Kansas, 2.9; Missouri, 1.9; Nebraska, 11.6; New York, 5.6; North Dakota, 29.6; Oklahoma, 9.3; Texas, 54.9; Washington, 72.7; and Wisconsin, 4.5.

Percent of Districts Reporting Declining Enrollments: Nation, 36.2 percent; Arkansas, 40.6; Colorado, 47.4; Illinois, 50.0; Iowa, 65.0; Kansas, 22.9; Missouri, 38.6; Nebraska, 40.9; New York, 57.9; North Dakota, 62.1; Oklahoma, 9.1; Texas, 15.7; Washington, 17.4; and Wisconsin, 45.5.

Average Dollar Amount of Last Bond Issue Per District: Nation, \$716,000; Arkansas, \$428,111; Colorado, \$573,642; Illinois, \$543,066; Iowa, \$826,448; Kansas, \$1,140,600; Missouri, \$520,774; Nebraska, \$630,794; New York, \$748,437; North Dakota, \$212,125; Oklahoma, \$364,837; Texas \$911,400; Washington, \$801,152; and Wisconsin, \$756,722.

Average Class Size of Graduating Seniors (1982-83): Nation, 34.5 students; Arkansas, 30.9; Colorado, 17.8; Illinois, 42.8; Iowa, 39.3; Kansas, 33.3; Missouri, 39.6; Nebraska, 29.0; New York, 44.9; North Dakota, 22.2; Oklahoma, 32.9; Oregon, 21.0; Texas 27.3; Washington, 31.8; and Wisconsin, 49.8.

Percent of Graduating Seniors (1982-83) Entering College or Technical School: Nation, 52.7 percent; Arkansas, 43.2; Colorado, 54.8; Illinois, 48.1; Iowa, 58.6; Kansas, 62.8; Missouri, 41.1; Nebraska, 63.4; New York, 62.7; North Dakota, 71.5; Oklahoma, 45.8; Texas, 44.6; Washington, 49.0; and Wisconsin, 52.7.

Percent of Districts Offering Sports Programs: Nation: basketball, 100 percent of districts; football, 69.2; baseball, 55.4; softball, 37.7; volleyball, 65.7; cross country, 23.3; wrestling, 25.2; track and field, 78.7; golf, 22.4; and swimming, 3.2.

Arkansas: basketball, 100; football, 32.3; baseball, 58.1; softball, 32.3; volleyball, 38.7; cross country, 12.9; wrestling, 3.2; track and field, 54.8; golf, 0; and swimming, 0.

Colorado: basketball, 100; football, 73.7; baseball, 57.9; softball, 10.5; volleyball, 84.2; cross country, 15.8; wrestling, 52.6; track and field, 89.5; golf, 0; and swimming, 0.

Illinois: basketball, 100; football, 51.7; baseball, 65.5; softball, 44.8; volleyball, 96.5; cross country, 31.0; wrestling, 13.8; track and field, 72.4; golf, 10.3; and swimming, 0.

Iowa: basketball, 100; football, 85.4; baseball, 100; softball, 100; volleyball, 70.7; cross country, 36.6; wrestling, 51.2; track and field, 100; golf, 56.1; and swimming, 2.4.

Kansas: basketball, 100; football, 100; baseball, 8.6; softball, 2.9; volleyball, 85.7; cross country, 42.9; wrestling, 17.1; track and field, 97.1; golf, 28.6; and swimming, 2.9.

Missouri: basketball, 100; football, 37.3; baseball, 58.2; softball, 62.8; volleyball, 53.5; cross country, 27.9; wrestling, 7.0; track and field, 62.8; golf, 7.0; and swimming, 0.

Nebraska: basketball, 100; football, 100; baseball, 100; softball, 4.6; volleyball, 100; cross country, 18.6; wrestling, 37.2; track and field, 100; golf, 25.6; and swimming, 0.

New York: basketball, 100; football, 40.0; baseball, 95.0; softball, 100; volleyball, 50.0; cross country, 35.0; wrestling, 35.0; track and field, 40.0; golf, 15.0; and swimming, 5.0.

North Dakota: basketball, 100; football, 58.6; baseball, 31.0; softball, 10.3; volleyball, 17.2; cross country, 13.8; track and field, 89.7; golf, 20.7; and swimming, 0.

Oklahoma: basketball, 100; football, 54.5; baseball, 86.4; softball, 43.2; volleyball, 36.4; cross country, 13.7; wrestling, 15.9; track and field, 59.1; golf, 13.6; and swimming, 11.4.

Texas: basketball, 100; football, 69.5; baseball, 43.9; softball, 13.4; cross country, 3.7; wrestling, 1.2; track and field, 96.3; golf, 40.2; and swimming, 2.4.

Washington: basketball, 100; football, 95.8; baseball, 79.2; softball, 54.2; volleyball, 100; cross country, 25.0; wrestling, 37.5; track and field, 70.8; golf, 8.3; and swimming, 8.3.

Wisconsin: basketball, 100; football, 73.9; baseball, 91.3; softball, 39.1; volleyball, 100; cross country, 30.4; wrestling, 52.2; track and field, 78.3; golf, 30.4; and swimming, 8.7.

Percent of Districts Offering Selected Academic Courses:
Nation: Spanish, 41.8 percent; German, 9.7; French, 18.9; calculus, 35.9; chemistry, 79.4; computer science, 60.3; electronics, 13.0; vocational agriculture, 63.1; and physics, 67.7.

Arkansas: Spanish, 11.5; German, 3.8; French, 19.2; calculus, 15.4; chemistry, 61.5; computer science, 42.3; electronics, 3.8; vocational agriculture, 73.1; and physics, 50.0.

Colorado: Spanish, 55.6; German, 5.6; French, 16.7; calculus, 50.0; chemistry, 83.3; computer science, 77.8; electronics, 11.1; vocational agriculture, 44.4; and physics, 77.8.

Illinois: Spanish, 64.3; German, 10.7; French, 28.6; calculus, 46.4; chemistry, 82.1; computer science, 67.9; electronics, 25.0; vocational agriculture, 85.7; and

physics, 85.7.

Iowa: Spanish, 58.5; German, 9.7; French, 29.3; calculus, 51.2; chemistry, 87.8; computer science, 75.6; electronics, 31.7; vocational agriculture, 58.5; and physics, 85.3.

Kansas: Spanish, 42.9; German, 14.3; French, 25.7; calculus, 40.0; chemistry, 82.9; computer science, 80.0; electronics, 5.7; vocational agriculture, 45.7; and physics, 65.7.

Missouri: Spanish 20.0; German, 7.5; French, 17.5; calculus, 12.5; chemistry 80.0; computer science, 80.0; electronics, 17.5; vocational agriculture, 70.0; and physics, 52.5.

Nebraska: Spanish, 27.9; German, 7.0; French, 11.6; calculus, 34.9; chemistry, 88.4; computer science, 69.8; electronics, 18.6; vocational agriculture, 41.9; and physics, 83.7.

New York: Spanish, 75.0; German, 100; French, 75.0; calculus, 60.0; chemistry, 90.0; computer science, 80.0; electronics, 25.0; vocational agriculture, 35.0; and physics, 85.0.

North Dakota: Spanish, 0; German, 11.1; French, 14.8; calculus, 33.3; chemistry, 81.5; computer science, 70.4; electronics, 7.4; vocational agriculture, 55.6; and physics, 74.1.

Oklahoma: Spanish, 38.1; German, 4.8; French, 9.5; calculus, 19.0; chemistry, 73.8; computer science, 42.9; electronics, 9.5; vocational agriculture, 83.3; and physics, 50.0.

Texas: Spanish, 47.4; German, 0; French, 1.3; calculus, 22.4; chemistry, 69.7; computer science, 28.9; electronics, 2.6; vocational agriculture, 90.8; and physics, 50.0.

Washington: Spanish, 41.7; German, 25.0; French, 37.5; calculus, 45.8; chemistry, 79.8; computer science, 70.8; electronics, 20.8; vocational agriculture, 70.8; and physics, 87.5.

Wisconsin: Spanish, 47.8; German, 21.7; French, 8.7; calculus, 56.5; chemistry, 69.6; computer science, 73.9; electronics, 26.1; vocational agriculture, 65.2; and physics, 65.2.

Conclusion

The 13 states cited in this report are among the states in the nation with the largest proportion of small/rural school districts within their boundaries. Although many similarities were found among these districts, evidence also indicates that the status and condition of schools across rural America varies greatly. Such a finding suggests that efforts to improve rural education can best be met at the state or local level where area specific problems

can be addressed and treated. It is hoped that the information presented herein will assist educators to more knowledgeably enhance the strengths and address the needs of their state's small/rural districts.

One weakness of this study is that it did not provide a comparison with urban districts. Further research to identify similarities and differences with urban districts enrolling large student bodies would provide educators with comparative information that could assist administrators in the operation of small/rural districts.

References

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