



Rural Education Center

News Update for REC Members

Date: Sept. 15, 2009

Topic: *Consolidation*

Dear REC Members:

Here is the latest information concerning “consolidation”. I have put this into a Q & A format.

Question: During the 2009 legislative session, there was discussion regarding consolidation of school districts. What was the result?

Answer: The final budget that was passed by the 2009 Legislature and signed by the Governor **directs the Joint Legislative and Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) to conduct a study.** JLARC will analyze the relationship between the cost of school districts and their enrollment size. The study is to include: 1) an analysis of how categories of cost vary related to size; 2) a review of other factors that may impact costs; 3) case studies on the change in cost patterns occurring after school district consolidations and for school districts operating under state oversight conditions; and 4) a review of available research on nonfinancial benefits and impacts associated with school district size.

The language contained in the last sentence above is very important. **Those of us that work in small and rural districts know that there are many “nonfinancial benefits” associated with school district size.**

Question: When is JLARC going to complete this study?

Answer: According to JLARC’s 2009-11 work plan, the preliminary study “consolidation” study is to be completed May of 2010, with the final study completed by June of 2010. Please stay tuned for more updates on the JLARC study.

Question: Wasn't there some kind of "mini-summit" on consolidation during the WASA Small Schools Conference in March and what was the result?

Answer: Yes, there was a "mini summit" that was held in Yakima in March, 2009. With input and direction from the mini-summit participants, WASA produced a colorful "Talking Points" flyer that contains powerful facts (backed by cited research studies) that emphasize the outstanding value that our small districts provide. Click on the PDF attachment to view this flyer.

Question: What else is happening regarding the consolidation issue?

Answer: During the WSSDA annual conference this November, there will be a session aimed for small school districts titled, "Consolidation of School Districts—What does the Research Say and What is Happening in Washington State?" This session will take place on Nov. 20 from 10:30 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. If you are planning on being at WSSDA annual conference, be sure to attend this session.

Question: Is it true that the Rural Education Center is working with a researcher to "get the facts" regarding rural and small schools in Washington State?

Answer: Yes! Dr. Todd Johnson, the Director for the Center of Research and Data Analysis at ESD 113 is under contract with the REC/ESD 101 (our fiscal agent) to review available Washington State data in the following areas:

- Graduation Rates
- Achievement Gap
- Equity and Excellence
- College and Career

Dr. Johnson and his research team will be publishing research "briefs" on each of these four topics. The first brief will focus on graduation rates and is scheduled to be completed this fall.

Each REC member will receive a copy of the briefs as soon as they are published.

If you have any questions or would like further information on consolidation, please contact me at jimkowalkowski@davenport.wednet.edu or at 509-725-1481.

Best wishes for a great school year!

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