

Voices from Rural Oklahoma: School Funding

The Four-Day School Week and Administrative Consolidation

In the report “Voices from Rural Oklahoma” we conducted a series of focus groups and interviews with students, parents, and business leaders throughout the state to understand their perspectives on public education. We spoke to more than 80 individuals living in 47 rural communities. School funding frequently emerged as a pressing issue for the state.

In addition to the effect of low funding on teacher salaries and course offerings, participants are deeply concerned about two strategies for addressing budget shortfalls: the four-day school week and school consolidation.

The Four-Day School Week

Currently, 98 of Oklahoma’s school districts (19 percent) are operating on a four-day school week. Rural community members expressed three common concerns with the four-day school week policy:

- They believe it negatively impacts families in which both parents are working
- They are concerned about how the policy affects students’ academic outcomes
- They are unconvinced that the policy actually saves districts any money

Given these uncertainties and concerns, state and local policymakers should strongly consider alternative policies and engage in more extensive research and analysis before adopting a four-day school week.

Administrative Consolidation

Consolidation can enable limited resources to be deployed more efficiently. It can take two forms:

- School-level, where schools are closed and districts are merged
- Administrative, where district leadership positions are merged

Rural community members are deeply concerned about the negative impact that school-level consolidation would have on their local economies. However, they are more open to administrative consolidation. The individuals we spoke with believe administrative consolidation is possible, based on their understanding that:

- Each of Oklahoma’s 513 school districts currently has its own superintendent
- One superintendent could reasonably oversee multiple small districts

Those we spoke with believe that state and local leaders should work to address inefficiencies at the administrative level before taking steps as dramatic and potentially harmful as closing schools.

Oklahoma Education QUICK FACTS

- 1 in 3 students attends rural schools
- 390 of 513 districts are rural
- \$8,700 average per pupil spending, 47th in U.S.
- 19% of districts operate on a four-day school week
- 18% of rural eighth-graders score proficient or higher on NAEP math (compared to 32% nationally)
- 27% of rural eighth-graders score proficient or higher on NAEP reading (compared to 33% nationally)
- 19% of rural families live in poverty (compared to 14% in Oklahoma City and 16% in Tulsa)

Sources: National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data, United States Census Bureau, Oklahoma Public School Resource Center, National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2010-2014 five-year American Community Survey estimates, USDA Economic Research Service, Center for Rural Affairs