

VOL. 2 ISSUE 1

## FUNDING IMPACT ON RURAL SCHOOLS

**Q.** As a public education advocate, share a little about yourself?

**A.** Raised by a teacher and a minister, I was taught that we live to serve others and that education prepares us for the opportunities in which to do so. My passion for education, advocacy, and service found its voice as I became involved in public education organizations. Those experiences taught me that we can stand firm in our values and advance our cause by being respectful and finding common ground with those who have a different view.

**Q.** Do small/rural schools like Millsap ISD have greater challenges offering learning opportunities for all students compared to larger urban/suburban school districts? What are some examples?

**A.** For most small/rural schools, funding is an immense obstacle. All requirements, laws, rules, and policies must be followed whether there is one student in a district or 250,000. As it should be, that could mean a vehicle, piece of equipment, curriculum, or staff member is secured to meet one student's need. The impact of that cost is far greater on a small school's budget because a higher percentage of the budget is used for a smaller percent of enrollment.

Research shows the most important factor in student success is a highly qualified, experienced teacher. Yet, staff recruitment and retention are a challenge as we compete with surrounding larger districts with greater funding and higher salaries. There is also a negative financial impact for each educator that must be replaced and trained/mentored.

**Q.** What are some of the solutions that provide equitable learning opportunities to rural students? Do these opportunities cost more in comparison to larger school districts?

**A.** Partnerships are extremely important to small districts. We partner with other districts, service centers, colleges, etc. in order to give our students the opportunities they deserve. The relationships we have with contractors and consultants are a key factor to student success because they understand our limited resources and are willing to think out of the box to work within our means. These solutions do cost more per pupil compared to the same services in a large district simply because some fees such as set-up, training, travel, or per campus costs are the same whether there are 200 students or 2000.

**Q.** The public school finance system will be a priority of the Texas 86th Legislative session. Why is it important that our legislators understand it costs more to provide equitable learning opportunities in smaller districts than in larger ones?

**A.** Many people, particularly legislators who have never been part of a small/rural district, believe the answer to our funding difficulties is consolidation. However, more than half the districts in Texas are small and serve as their communities' greatest economic contributor. I strive to help legislators understand that small districts stretch every dollar to its maximum capacity because every student in Texas deserves the same opportunities regardless of their zip code. Additionally, every financial legislative decision has a compounded effect on small districts. For instance, this is only the second year MISD has received a portion of the small school allotment and there is already a proposal to remove it from the FSP formulas to a stand-alone allotment. This would result in fewer funds because the FSP impacts several parts of the template whereas a stand-alone is figured once.

**Q.** History provides us with inspiring quotes about public education. What is your legacy quote that we might find inspiring future generations?

**A.** "The perpetuation of our society is dependent on educating every citizen. The preservation of public education must be our first priority as it ensures the opportunity for every child to contribute to America's continued success." ~ Deann Lee