

Organization of Rural Oklahoma Schools

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OROS Scholarship Committees Make Selections

The OROS Scholarship recipients have been selected and approved by the board of directors. The scholarship is a one-time five-hundred dollar award to one graduating senior in each of the four quadrants of our organization. The committees, consisting of the board of directors of the four quadrants, did an outstanding job in their selection process. The directors did not participate in the selection of applicants from their quadrant. Scholarship plaques will be awarded on or before the graduation date of each quadrant winner. Scholarship monies will be distributed upon proof of enrollment in a post-secondary institution and an OROS officer or Board of Director will make every effort to attend the award ceremonies to make the presentations. The Perry Willis Scholarship recipient was also selected by a committee consisting of the OROS officers. The Perry Willis Scholarship is a one-thousand dollar award funded by Mass Group Marketing and for the first time is matched this year by the Oklahoma Schools Property and Casualty Coop and will be paid directly to the recipient. The essays of the five winners are included in this newsletter. This year's recipients are: The Perry Willis Scholarship - **Kathy Jo Daniel, Coleman Public Schools**; Northeast Quadrant - **Nicole Branam, Warner Public Schools**; Southwest Quadrant - **Whitini Root, Hydro-Eakly Public Schools**; Northwest Quadrant - **Rachel Yauk, Buffalo Public Schools**; Southeast Quadrant - **Teagan Tully, Latta Public Schools**. Congratulations students and we wish you the best in your future endeavors.

Scholarship Essays

(Editors note) Each applicant was asked to write a short essay discussing the applicant's experiences in a rural educational setting, discussing the benefits as well as detriments of such a setting, as compared to an urban school system, and to discuss the applicant's opinion as to whether or not it would be beneficial for rural schools to remain in operation for future generations. The following essays were submitted by the four quadrant scholarship recipients and the Perry Willis Scholarship recipient. They are written in their entirety.

Kathy Jo Daniel
The Perry Willis Scholarship
Coleman Public Schools

I am a fourth generation student in a small, rural school that my family has attended for nearly one-hundred years. My great-grandmother, grandfather, father, and dozens of other family members were well educated and prepared for successful lives in this rural school, and I feel that I have been as well.

There are those in our country who believe that larger schools in larger cities have much more to offer their students and think that the education gained there is far superior to that education gained in small

schools. Some believe it is because teachers at larger school are more qualified than teachers at smaller schools. In Oklahoma, all public school teachers have basically the same training. They all have the same college degrees in education and all have to pass the same teacher certification tests. This proves that teachers are no different based on their education. Although it is a fact that larger schools can offer more of a variety than small schools, there is still so much that a student can gain from attending a smaller school. For one, in small schools there isn't as much of a need for as many choices, simply because there aren't as many students. Students are already busy enough with the activities they are engaged in. Another benefit to smaller schools is smaller class sizes and more one-on-one attention from teachers. In larger schools, teachers cannot be as personally involved with their students because they have so many students they can't spend as much time with them individually. In smaller schools, teachers tend to be more invested in their students. Because they teach fewer kids, they get to know them better. Most of my teachers live in our community, and are engaged in all of our activities. There is a lot more community involvement in a rural school-mostly because it's the only thing in town. In my opinion, the only advantage that a larger school has over small schools is the broader variety of classes they can offer; however, even that is offset by the fact that students in smaller schools now have access to web-based classes and satellite classes.

I certainly believe that it would be very beneficial for rural schools to remain in operation for future generations. My opinion may be biased because I have not had the experience in a larger school setting. However, I truly feel if given the option of choosing, I would still prefer to stay at a smaller school. For rural areas, the school is the heart of the community, and without the school, the community dies.

Teagan Tully
Southeast Quadrant Representative
Latta Public Schools

For thirteen years I have had many great learning experiences through Latta's educational system. Even though Latta is a rural school, it outshines other urban schools in regards to its exceptional test scores, award-winning faculty, caring teachers, and challenging courses. With the help of outstanding teachers, I have been able to learn what I want to do with my life and what I'm capable of.

There are many benefits to attending a rural school. Smaller classes help teachers meet the individual needs of each of their students. For example, when I was in third grade, I struggled with learning my multiplication tables. My teacher took the time to help me study the tables until I had mastered them. She boosted my confidence and I was then able to recite the tables by heart - a skill that I still use today. Another benefit to attending a rural school is the family-like atmosphere. This

hospitable climate of the school contributes to new students feeling welcome and accepted. At Latta, if a student, faculty member or local citizen is in need, school organizations step up and do their part to raise awareness and financial support.

Although there are many benefits to attending places such as Latta, there are a few drawbacks. Rural schools do not always have the funds to offer the same amount of courses, organizations, and extra-curricular activities as urban schools. In addition, the small, family-like atmosphere can sometimes lead to a less culturally diverse student body. Students who have always attended a rural school might find themselves experiencing a bit of "culture shock" once they graduate and attend a larger university.

Overall, my experience in a rural school has been nothing but positive. Without schools like Latta, the importance of family and community within the school system could be lost. It is vital to keep rural schools in operation, so that they will understand the values of their community and have a deeper respect for themselves and those who are providing them with an exceptional education.

Rachel Yauk
Northwest Quadrant Representative
Buffalo Public Schools

Nestled on the Panhandle's cusp amongst cows grazing on the rolling hills of the Great Plains, Buffalo Oklahoma is where I call home. Growing up in this rural community of 1,200 people has been a major contributor to my success throughout my life. Although some people who live in rural areas might feel isolated from all forms of civilization, I believe small towns and schools grant opportunities to students that would otherwise be unattainable.

As a quiet and timid pre-school student, I entered the Buffalo Public School system at age four. Now, as an eighteen year-old Senior, I am equipped to enter the next phase of my life with confidence. In a small school, leadership opportunities abound. I am able to participate in a wide variety of organizations, which develop life skills and responsibility. Whereas many times, in larger schools, students are forced to concentrate their efforts towards one to two sports or clubs. The relationship with the faculty and staff is able to be more intimate in small schools. I have known all my teachers for several years and feel comfortable approaching them, and enjoy chatting with them after class. For the students who struggle in school, the close student-teacher relationship is especially beneficial; the teachers talk to the students, encourage them, and hold them accountable if they have not been performing to the best of their abilities.

Rural schools, however, also have their drawbacks. With the limited staff members many times there is not the wide variety of courses found in a larger school-generally humanities and Advanced Placement courses are the first to be removed from the schedule. Nevertheless, Buffalo has addressed this issue by allowing students to take concurrent classes from the college of their choice. Cultural experiences, such as plays, ballets, and museums, are scarce in our community. Instead of being mundane, efforts have to be consciously made towards exposure to liberal arts; it is an achievable task, and makes cultural excursions much more memorable and meaningful. I have been able to travel to eight different countries and have gone on numerous school and family trips to plays, concerts, and museums. Throughout the past fourteen years a large majority of my twenty-one classmates have remained the same.

One might consider this too long a period of time to enjoy each others' company-sometimes I do feel like I know a little *too* much-but this familiarity has formed a bond of camaraderie within our class that is unique to a small school environment.

Consolidating rural schools would not only be inefficient, it would be a loss for all Oklahomans. Many small towns in Oklahoma are over twenty miles apart. Thus, consolidating would require extended commutes for the students. The schools in small towns are the pride and joy of the older citizens in the community; they enjoy cheering for Bison sports teams and supporting students through fundraisers et cetera. With approximately 460 towns (incorporated communities with a population of approximately 1000 or less) and only 200 cities (with more than 1000 in population), a large majority of Oklahoma's school would be considered rural. Rural communities have an idealistic environment that allows adolescents to slow down and stay grounded in this culture of our fast-paced society. Students who have attended a rural school are more likely to believe that they can do it all-since they did it all in their high school.

Without rural schools, Oklahoma's educational backbone would be devoid of vital vertebrates. Growing up in Buffalo has allowed me to strive tenaciously to participate in every activity in which I am involved; confidently face adversity; lovingly lead others to success; prudently learn from my mistakes; and courageously challenge society as an unpretentious young woman who came from an agriculture-centered small town.

Nicole Branam
Northeast Quadrant Representative
Warner Public Schools

Attending a small, rural school has been the only experience of schooling I have known; however, I would not change it. Attending a rural school has given me many leadership opportunities that I wouldn't receive elsewhere. I've been able to remain ranked number one in my class while being cheer Captain, FCCLA District President, and a member of many other organizations. I have been able to accomplish so much because of the close relationships I have with various teachers/staff. In a larger setting, I would not get as much one on one time with my teachers and counselor. Without many of them, I would not have stepped up as a leader like I have. On the other side of the picture, I haven't had as many options for classes and extracurricular activities as I would at a larger school.

A rural setting has many benefits. I have come to know my school counselor very well over the past few years. She is the one that helps me stay focused. I have also grown close to a few of my teachers, who not only support me, but also help me develop as a leader. Smaller class sizes and a laid back setting allow me to engage in learning experiences in a deeper, yet more relaxed way. Also, attending a small school where teachers are willing to work with me gives me more freedoms to be involved in many different activities.

One of the few negatives of going to a rural school includes having fewer opportunities. With fewer students and teachers, not as many class options are available. I would love to be involved in drama and speech classes. I would also like to take more advanced classes. Some classes are still challenging, but I only have one AP class available. A larger school would probably be more challenging and would push me to better myself.

All in all, I believe that the benefits of going to a small school outweigh the detriments. I wouldn't be the person or leader I am today without a small school environment. I think that closing small schools would close many doors for students who might not be able to excel in a larger class setting. Small schools are a haven to some students; they create a positive learning environment, not only in the classroom, but also in the community. Rural schools should continue to remain open and stay the life changers they are.

Whitini Root
Southwest Quadrant Representative
Hydro-Eakly Public Schools

At urban school systems, students would be shocked to know that teachers at rural educational settings distribute their personal information, including their telephone numbers and contact information, to allow students to reach them at any time for assistance on homework or questions about assignments. In these large schools, the students do not have a one-on-one relationship with their teachers, some teachers may not even remember their names. At the schools I have attended, I am able to say I have known each of my teachers and had a personal relationship with them. I attended Eakly Public School for Kindergarten and Hydro-Eakly Public School from first grade to the present time. Each of these school systems are considered rural educational settings. Having pointed out one advantage to attending a rural school, I am aware that there are more advantages, but also some disadvantages.

Another advantage of rural school systems includes closer relationships with not only the teachers, but also fellow students. With these friendships, comes room for study groups or tutoring situations. One example includes the chemistry study group our teacher held last year to get together students who felt they needed further help on the concepts that were taught in class. A major advantage of rural educational settings is safety. Schools with less children have a less probability of safety issues. One example of this includes the metal detectors and surveillance cameras that are being placed in urban school systems. At the current time, it is difficult to find a single urban school without these adaptations to maintain a safe school. At rural schools, teachers and administration know where every kid is at all times. They are never let out of sight and if they are not to be found or do not attend school, the child's parent is notified. For this reason, less youth skip school or get into trouble. Along with each of these advantages comes another disadvantage.

One disadvantage rural educational settings face is that a lesser amount of classes are offered. In urban schools, students have the choices of taking multiple Advanced Placement or higher-level classes, while at rural schools only one or two of these choices may be available. At Hydro-Eakly High School only one Advanced Placement Class is available for English and honors classes for mathematics. Each of these advanced classes was first implemented this present school year. Another disadvantage concerns less recognition for athletics. Most colleges take pride in scouting athletes from larger schools, while few take the time to travel to rural settings to scout athletes who attend these rural educational settings. However, these colleges miss out on some of the best athletes from rural schools who put in the extra effort of practice at home, rather than effort only while practicing at school. Also at smaller schools, there is less competition for academics. In urban schools there may be 6 or more valedictorians, rather than one or two as there are in rural schools. This does not mean that larger schools are more intelligent than rural educational settings like most people think.

Rural education has been extremely helpful in my learning experience, and, in my opinion, rural schools should never shut their doors if they do not have to. Rural schools encounter hardships with finances and the number of students, but if it is possible, they should fight to overcome those issues. I believe it will be beneficial for rural educational systems to remain in operation in the future. Students who learn better in a one-on-one atmosphere will greatly appreciate being able to attend a rural school. I would not have accomplished what I have today without having been taught in a rural educational setting, in which the teachers truly care about their students' lives and futures.

OROS Calendar

OROS Board of Directors Meeting

May 11, 2011

OSSAA Building

Oklahoma City, OK

10:00 A.M.

OROS Annual Meeting

May 11, 2011

OSSAA Building

Oklahoma City, OK

9:30 A.M.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Oklahoma Schools Property/Casualty Cooperative is a program designed for Oklahoma Public Schools. This program can provide your School District secure coverage at significant savings over other coverage providers. For an opportunity to participate in this program, please forward the appropriate information to Oklahoma Schools Property Casualty Cooperative, 5030 N. May Avenue, Box 106, Oklahoma City, OK 73112, or for a faster response fax to (903) 784-2895. The information needed is:

Certificate of Coverage from your current year policies (also provide previous years if available), including the invoice or pricing page.

Property Schedule from your most recent property appraisal. (This lists each building with construction type, year built, square footage, replacement cost, and content replacement cost)

Vehicle Schedule that includes year, make, model, last 4 VIN, and purchase cost.

Detail loss runs, by line of coverage / by coverage term, for the previous five (5) years.

For more information you may contact:

Lee Roy Pettyjohn 580-920-4572 or by e-mail leeroy@redriverok.com