

OROS NEWSLETTER

ORGANIZATION OF RURAL
OKLAHOMA SCHOOLS

PO BOX 199 DEWAR, OK 74431

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OROS SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

The OROS Scholarship winners were selected at the April 2015 monthly board meeting. The scholarship committee presented their nominations to the Board of Directors and the winners were picked by a vote of the board. A winner from each quadrant of the state was selected. In addition, the recipient for the Perry Willis Scholarship was also chosen. The winners for each scholarship are as follows:

- Perry Willis Scholarship--Austin Stottlemire, Kingston
- Southeast Quadrant--Ryan Scott, Stonewall
- Southwest Quadrant--Trenton Julian, Mountain View-Gotebo
- Northeast Quadrant--Nicholas Burt, Fort Gibson
- Northwest Quadrant--Sarah Bussey, Hydro Eakley

The winners' essays will be printed throughout this newsletter.

PERRY WILLIS SCHOLARSHIP WINNER--AUSTIN STOTTEMYRE

My singular experience with public education has taken place at Kingston Public Schools. Starting in kindergarten and now wrapping it all up in my senior year as a Redskin, my experience has been one of caring teachers, close knit friends, and fun filled activities. Although I have visited many other schools during my twelve year trek, I cannot imagine a better educational journey than the one I have known.

One of the aspects I enjoy most about my school is the small student body population. Rural schools such as mine, typically have a smaller student body, therefore, the class sizes are smaller as well. In a class with fewer students, I am more likely to engage in discussion with the instructor and my peers. One on one attention from the instructor is more likely to occur when student/teacher ratios are low, and small group projects are ideal to enhance learning. My teachers are also very accessible, before and after school, and they make it a point to keep students informed of their academic progress. Every student is made to feel like they matter. In contrast, a larger urban school would have larger class sizes, less individualized attention, and fewer opportunities to actively engage during instruction. Many students in a large group setting may feel intimidated, withdrawing from any group interaction and possibly losing interest and motivation to complete assignments.

Other positive aspects of rural schools from which I have benefitted include having a larger core of close friends and acquaintances. Because upper and lower classmen may share many classes, the line of separation and competition between grade levels seems to be diminished. This lack of separation promotes an atmosphere of camaraderie and community among the entire student body that is often absent in an urban school. I have also had the opportunity to become active in numerous extra-curricular activities. Simply because of the numbers, students in rural schools do not have to specialize in one activity like students in the larger districts might. In my school, students are involved in multiple activities at once, such as band, football, student council, FFA, and choir, creating more balanced and diverse individuals.

Although I would recommend a rural school over an urban one, a smaller school can have disadvantages as well. For instance, my high school does not offer numerous advanced courses or a variety of courses in specific subject areas.

Continued Pg 2-See Stottlemire

There is a lot going on this time of year. Trying to finish the school year and complete all the spring activities. There is also a lot happening at the State Capitol. The passing of the Statewide Charter Schools bill starts a different kind of era for public schools. We will have to find a way to make this work to our advantage. The good part of this bill is the local school board is in control of whether or not your district or part of your district has a charter school.

It looks like there will be some changes made to the current testing program but it is in conference committee and we don't know any details at this time. The big issue is getting the standards in place to make sure that our testing program doesn't continue to change.

There will also be changes to RSA which is in conference committee. It looks like they will extend the use of the committee for five more years. It also looks like they are going to add remediation for 1st and 2nd graders that are reading below grade level.

Changes to the the A-F Grading System will be waiting until the next session. As of now, they are going to let the SDE review it and make recommendations for change that need to be made.

There has been a lot of talk about funding for next year with a \$611 million deficit to overcome. The appropriations leadership in both houses seem to be in agreement to hold Common Education to minimal cuts. I wouldn't count on escaping without a cut but it looks like it not be as large as other state agencies.

**MAKE YOUR PLANS NOW
TO ATTEND THE ANNUAL
OROS BUSINESS MEETING
AT 9:30A.M. ON MAY 6,
2015 AT THE OSSAA
BUILDING IN OKC**

Stottlemyre cont....

An urban school may have five advanced life sciences to choose from whereas a rural district may only offer two. Honors and advanced courses may not be necessary for success, but these types of classes often provide an academic advantage to college bound students. Another disadvantage to attending a small school is the lack of variety in clubs and organizations that many larger schools offer. This situation may be a result of funding deficiencies or even lack of personnel, but regardless of the reason, rural students miss many opportunities for community involvement and leadership growth as a result.

Even with the few disadvantages I have mentioned, rural schools play a vital role in our educational system of today. Students are as diverse in personality and preferences as color chips are in a paint store. A shy, timid child could blossom in a small, intimate setting, while an outgoing and assertive child would be better suited to a large school. Funneling all students through the same type of school system would not only be unfair to the students, but it would also be counterproductive in helping students achieve success. While it is hard to predict an atmosphere of success for any one individual, rural schools have traditionally cultivated students who are confident, motivated and focused upon attaining their goals. Many lawyers, doctors, accountants and political leaders have been the product of a rural school system. For this very reason, I believe it is in the best interest of future generations that our rural education systems remain in operation. In doing so, we are affording every

SOUTHEAST QUADRANT WINNER--RYAN SCOTT

For the entirety of my time in high school, I have attended Stonewall. Stonewall High is situated in a town of 465 people with one gas station, one cafe, one bank, and no stoplights. I know everyone at my school by name. In my time here, I have had the opportunity to participate in several organizations, including Business Professionals of America, FFA, and Student Council. Through these organizations I have been able to reach out in my community and meet new people around the state and nation. I would not trade my time at Stonewall for anything.

I have been able to receive more one-on-one time with teachers and more hands-on experience in my agricultural classes due to the small size of my school. The time I've spent being helped by a teacher individually has saved me multiple times from failing a class or bombing a test. There's no way I would have been able to receive this level of attention in a high school in an urban setting, and for my good fortune of being raised in an environment of a rural school I am thankful.

While many other schools may offer more options for extracurricular activity, the level of quality in the organizations I have been in is incredible and to be able to match that quality in any size of school would be difficult to say the least. In my time in FFA, I have been able to stand out and have better chances to attend Alumni Camp with 400 other FFA members from around the state for the past two summers. I was able to make friendships that I still have and listen to speakers from all walks of life. My chapter was able to attend the National FFA Convention in Louisville, KY and I have had the opportunity to attend the State FFA Convention each year I have been a member. I have been able to serve as president of FFA, Business Professionals of America, and my senior class.

I feel that the quality of education I have received at Stonewall has been equal to if not superior to any urban public school. I've been taught at the same level in my classes as I would have at an equal class at an urban school. I will be graduating in May as the valedictorian of my senior class and will always remember the time I had here. I've felt that life at a rural school allows for one to not just be another student, but to be better able to enter into the world as a leader. Growing up going to Stonewall has been a privilege. While there may be benefits to an urban

SOUTHWEST QUADRANT WINNER--TRENTON T. JULIAN

What does it feel like to be famous? Try walking through the cafeteria during the elementary lunch break as a high school senior. That's how I feel every day at my small town, rural school. It's "high-fives" all around. I attend a K-12 school and everyone knows everyone. It's a great feeling to be looked up to by the little ones, but that is just one perk of living in a rural educational setting.

As you can imagine, the teacher to student ratio is much smaller than to that of an urban school system. This creates more individualized learning and allows the teacher to focus on the various needs of the students. Closer relationships are created between classmates and teachers leading to greater educational success. This has certainly been the case at my school, as our record would show. We were named a Blue Ribbon school in 2010 and are one of only 11 school districts out of over 500 in the state to receive all A's on the A-F school report. These are both big accomplishments.

Some may argue that an urban school setting offers a greater variety when it comes to programs, class schedules and extracurricular activity. This may be true. Our class schedules offer less class choices than they did several years ago. Teacher shortage and reduction in funding are both to blame. When it comes to the spectrum of extracurricular activities, the urban schools may have us beat. Although, I'm not sure that is necessarily a bad thing. Smaller, rural schools may have fewer choices, but many student participate in all of them. This allows us to experience many different types of activities leading to more opportunity. We have certainly produced our share of talented students that have gone on to receive athletic scholarships and compete on the college level.

Funding in the rural community has been cut drastically over the years causing schools to make hard decisions. Lots of schools in our area of the state have been pushed to consolidate, or even close. We have one of the smallest school districts in the area when it comes to enrollment, but this has not hampered the success of our students. Numerous professionals had their start behind the doors of Mountain View-Gotebo Public Schools and I intend to join the ranks as I pursue my engineering degree. I am proud to be a product of a small town, rural community and school, and I hope future generations get to experience the same opportunities I had.

NORTHEAST QUADRANT WINNER--NICHOLAS BURT

My name is Nicholas Burt . I am currently a senior at Fort Gibson High Schools. I am in the top 1% of my class of approximately 150 students. I am planning to attend Oklahoma State University in the fall of 2015, majoring in engineering. I believe that my high school experience has prepared me for college and given me a good foundation for the rest of my life.

Everything I need to be successful I've learned in my rural school Fort Gibson.

1) Going to a rural school-"...Everybody knows your name"

Most of my classmates live in Fort Gibson. We go to school together. We play sports together. We go to church together. We hang out together. (Okay, sometimes when we hang out, we go to bigger places, like Tulsa, OK.... but we load up and all go together) Having such a close relationship with my peers gives me a greater sense of responsibility. I know that people are watching me, people who know my name, people who know my parents. Knowing this encourages me to be the best that I can be in whatever I am doing.

2) Going to a rural school-"We are the Champions, of the world"

My rural school has given me a sense of pride and confidence that I will use the rest of my life, wherever that might take me. In our school, we are considerably involved in our school and community. With fewer numbers than larger school systems, we are it. If we don't do it, who will? We take pride in our school and community. We participate in academic and social extracurricular activities as well as sports. Due to this strong sense of pride and community, our school has a very low dropout rate. We are also a safer school. Rarely in my school or rural community have I encountered a situation where I have felt a sense of fear. I am free to learn, to grow, to experience life in a smaller, safe environment, which will help me as I continue my education and enter the workforce.

3) Going to a rural school I'm not "just another brick in the wall"

In our rural school, because of the things previously mentioned our teachers can focus more on teaching and less on discipline. Many of our teachers, we will have more than once, so they get to know us as a person, this allows them to teach us based on our level and style of learning. This closer relationship between student and teacher encourages learning and individual accountability.

I believe in small schools, because it has been a good experience for me. I feel that my school has offered me as much as possible, in terms of variety and depth of class curriculum that one should experience in a high school setting. I understand that at some smaller schools this cannot happen, because of lack of available qualified teachers and funding for specialized teachers and curriculum. I feel that some of the areas could be addressed by interactive learning situations, either in our schools or at home. Also, the broader curriculum needs, will and can be addressed at the next level as students continue their learning experiences in colleges, trade schools or specialized training courses.

I feel very fortunate to have the opportunity to grow and learn in a rural school community. I feel that it would be detrimental to students and therefore our communities to eliminate the rural schools from our education system.

NORTHWEST QUADRANT WINNER--SARAH BUSSEY (Hydro-Eakley)

Having been at a rural school since kindergarten, I feel that the benefits of a small school far outweigh the disadvantages. Rural schools give their students a more individualized learning experience and make success more attainable. In a large school, relationships with teachers and peers are not as personal as they can be in a rural setting. Students in small, rural schools are more likely to build a sense of connectedness to the entire school community and develop higher levels of engagement within the school.

I have also come to realize that rural school systems have closer ties to the community. The people of the community are very supportive and we as students are driven to express our appreciation by serving the community. For example, several bond issues have been passed to give us an almost completely new campus. Also, when we were in need of safer playground equipment, the community stepped in and donated enough money to purchase it. The school becomes the hub of the community and multiple generations share a desire to see the school thrive.

As a student in a small school I am able to be in more school organizations and have greater leadership opportunities. My activities and leadership roles have taught me responsibility, accountability, and teamwork. For example, when you work with others sometimes you have to take more than your fair share of the load, much like in real life. I have discovered how to manage the heavy load when others depend on me and see projects through to the end. I have also learned how to lead an organization in the planning of events.

In a smaller school I am given one-on-one attention from each of my teachers. They all know my name and are truly concerned with not only my academic success, but also my overall life experience. In a larger school I do not think I would be given this extra attention. In a small school I do not see the discipline problems that are common in large schools. Because of the personal relationships students have with their teachers, they seem to have more respect for them, and in turn, do not cause as many problems.

On the other hand, there are some disadvantages to going to a rural school. Even though we have received several grants and donations, we are still behind larger schools in the area of technology. Trying to keep up with advances in technology places a heavy burden on our limited budget. Also, urban schools have a more diverse student body, which gives their students a wider range of social groups from which to choose. In a larger school there is a greater selection of core classes and electives. Our school has addressed this by offering online classes and IETV classes. However, this attempt cannot replace the value of face to face interactions with the teachers.

Overall, going to a rural school is very beneficial. You get individualized attention, a positive and safe learning environment, and a more personal relationship with your community. I believe rural schools should definitely stay in operation for future generations. The extinction of small town values would be detrimental to our state and nation. There is a mutualistic relationship between a small town and its school. Neither one will survive without the other.

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