

DIVERSE LEARNERS

SUMMER 2020 | BRIEF 4

WHO ARE OKLAHOMA'S RURAL LEARNERS?

More than half of Oklahoma's public schools serve rural communities.

Compared to the national average of 15%, 29% of Oklahoma's public school students attend a rural school. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 52% of Oklahoma's public schools are located in areas classified as rural; the national average is 29%.

The 205,945 Oklahoma students in rural districts rank third in the nation in terms of racial diversity, 43.18% of rural students are American Indian, black, Hispanic, multi-race, or Asian. Rural schools have additional challenges. Oklahoma has the third-highest rate of students receiving special education services in rural districts at 18.48%, while the national average is 14%. Over half of rural students are economically disadvantaged (57.51%), and student mobility is 11.1%.

Oklahoma State Department of Education (2020). Rural School Demographics by School [data file]. Data retrieved May 8, 2020 from Oklahoma's longitudinal data system.

WHY IT MATTERS

Oklahoma students in rural communities experience varying access to healthcare, food security, Internet connectivity, access to advanced coursework and high-quality educational resources.

It is critical to provide supports for these diverse learners and work to address equitable access to resources to mitigate summer learning loss and support effective school re-entry in the fall.

In NWEA's research, summer learning loss was observed in math and reading across third to eighth grade.

Particularly during distance learning, challenges are intensified related to lack of equitable access to Internet connectivity for education resources, low number of healthcare providers and mental health providers, limited access to professional development for educators for distance learning and effective summer learning, need for varied ways to connect with families and provide food security. Also, the higher bus transportation costs to deliver food and learning packets result in less funding for instructional needs for rural students.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- **Focus** on student relationships and connections in addition to content.
- **Provide** multiple ways for students to experience learning – learning packets, library programs, Google Classroom, Zoom, Learning Management Systems, etc.
- **Communicate** with families by text, email, postal mail, grab and go packets and home visits.
- **Provide** reading resources for families to support summer reading.
- **Ensure** public library programs are well advertised.
- **Provide** hot spots for students and families for internet connectivity.
- **Provide** meals for students curbside at school sites and via bus route delivery.
- **Access** academic and social-emotional resources from state, regional, local and community organizations.
- **Provide** regular check-ins with students and families.
- **Provide** teacher “office hours” for students to talk with teachers for support.
- **Seek** feedback from families about needs for access and supports.
- **Use** tele-med and tele-therapy to meet individual family and student needs.

ATTENDING TO EQUITY

How can we attend to equity in rural communities to support summer learning and fall re-opening of schools?

Address health barriers that impede student learning.

Provide e-rate for internet connectivity.

Establish community programs to minimize food insecurity.

Establish local, regional and state consortiums to address specific issues that affect the rural community (food scarcity, poor healthcare access, limited access to postsecondary opportunities, etc).

Pool resources with neighboring districts.

Intervene to support rural students academically, behaviorally, emotionally and socially.

Partner with local career technology centers, community colleges and local universities.

Identify professional development opportunities at the local, regional and state level to support rural teachers and administrators to meet rural student needs.

Promote multiple pathways for educator preparation for rural teachers.

Identify rural students in gifted and talented areas of creativity, visual and performing arts, leadership, academics and intellectual ability.

Address disproportional identification of rural students as students with disabilities.

Provide training for educators to address poverty and social-emotional learning.

Provide personalized support for completion of college preparatory classes.

Establish effective mentoring programs for rural students.

Provide Extended School Year services to students with disabilities when a student’s IEP team has determined that the services are necessary.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How do we address the challenges that impact our rural students?

How can we address recruitment and retention of quality teachers to rural areas?

What resources are available in our school, district and community to support our efforts to understand and address inequities our rural families face?

How do educators develop relationships with families and students?

How can rural districts pool resources with surrounding districts and communities?

