Fiscal Comparison Paper

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Introduction

This paper aims to identify the variations in different school types related to school funding. From a geographical perspective, the three types of schools discussed in this paper are rural, suburban, and urban areas. There are similarities in each. For example, each one is designed to educate students. There are differences in each. For example, each one caters to a unique population of students. There are challenges in each. For example, each has specific needs, making funding distinctive in each area. Based on specific criteria in this paper, I will examine each geographic area, its financial advantages, and why.

Definitions and Examples of Each School Type

An urban area is where people live in close proximity. They generally have more resources because they have many more people paying taxes. They have multiple school choices for public and private education (Picus, 2020). An example of an urban school is Colonial High School in Orlando, Florida, with a student enrollment of about 3,350 (OCPS, 2023). A suburban area is a balance of urban and rural communities where many of the same conveniences of a city exist and a small-town feel. The area is less congested because you may see fewer apartment buildings than in an urban area. Multiple school choices are spread across a larger geographical area (Picus, 2020).

An example of a suburban school is Lake Minneola High School in Minneola, Florida. This is a suburb of Orlando. It serves a student enrollment of about 1,752 (Public School Review, 2003). A rural area is not exactly a farm, but many people think it is closely related. The homes are spread out, and apartment buildings are non-existent. There may be mobile homes or single-family structures. Schools are considerably smaller, with only one charter or private

school. Many families choose to home-school instead of sending students twenty to thirty miles to a school in their area (Picus, 2020). An example of a rural school is Cedar Key School in Cedar Key, Florida. This is a K-12 school and serves a student population of 250 (Public School Review, 2003).

State Funding Formulas

State funding, for schools, unlike federal funding for schools, is primarily funded from property taxes levied on local constituents. Florida has sixty-seven counties that incorporate many different school systems. More importantly, the counties serve urban, suburban, and rural communities. In the state of Florida, our educational system operates under the Florida Educational Finance Program (FEFP). The system uses a formula that is not explicit to an area. In our state, the formula has a greater impact depending on where you live, the challenges the area face, and the demographics of the area (Florida Department of Education, 2023).

The key components of (FEFP) include **student enrollment**, which counts the number of students enrolled in a district. Urban areas generally have more students, so they receive more funding, in theory. **Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) calculations** are a part of the FEFP formula that accounts for part-time students and other factors that might affect attendance. B**ase student allocation (BSA)** is the per-student funding each district gets. **District cost differential (DCD)** is the cost of living and labor market conditions in the different districts (Florida Department of Education, 2023).

Urban areas generally have higher living costs which is an advantage in funding. An area that needs more attention is **categorical funding**. This is additional funding provided for students with disabilities, ELL, and impoverishment. **Special programs** are the funds allocated

for gifted education, career and technical education, and other initiatives that may not exist in rural and suburban communities giving urban areas another advantage. **Local property tax** varies based on where the district is located. Urban areas have a more extensive tax base, potentially impacting the overall funding levels provided. **Weights and factors** affect funding due to disabilities and career education programs. The last part of the formula is the **state aid.** In Florida, this is designed to help make educational adequacy equitable across all districts. The formula is determined by multiplying the number of unweighted FTEs in each educational program by the cost factors to obtain the weighted FTEs. It is also important to note that in Florida, we have a provision set aside to help rural areas that may struggle with funding called the **sparsity funds** for those communities with less than 20,000 in total population (Florida Department of Education, 2023).

Equity vs. Adequacy

The significant difference in rural, suburban, and urban school environments is the available resources. The urban school environment has a considerable advantage due to a more extensive tax base which, in turn, gives them more local economic opportunities (Dhaliwal & Bruno, 2021). This, of course, gives them more support financially. More often than not, they have better schools that are equipped with more modern technology, and they have more extracurricular activities. Suburban schools have a smaller tax base than urban schools enjoy. They generally need more financial support than urban schools. Therefore their programs are reduced in size, and they depend more on contributions from outside agencies. Oddly enough, many suburban schools have the financial means to provide an exceptional learning environment. The external agencies are generally wealthy members of these schools'

communities (Picus, 2020). Lastly, rural schools are even smaller than suburban schools, and they often only have a few programs that the other two geographical areas have. They often need more funding, so their resources are minimal. They may need up-to-date textbooks or technologies. However, they benefit from smaller classroom sizes where teachers can give more one-on-one instruction to students struggling with the curriculum (Dhaliwal & Bruno, 2021).

Federal Funds

Most of our federal funding in Florida comes from the U.S. Department of Education. The federal government helps fund educational initiatives with specific guidelines on how to use the funds. In Florida, we take full advantage of the Title V Subpart 2 program that provides funding to assist rural school districts. In that regard, funding from the federal government can be used to fund Titles I-V, but that is it. Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESAE) is the largest federal funding the state of Florida receives. Although most of these funds are earmarked for students from impoverished homes, they can be used for the school's good as long as they are used in support of educational services. Title II, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), provides funding to support special education services. These funds cannot be used for anything else (Brown, Felecia, 2023).

SPED Funding

Special education funding in Florida does come from a variety of sources. As mentioned earlier, the IDEA is a federal government program specifically designed to finance SPED. However, the bulk of funding for SPED comes from state and local sources. We have a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) program in Florida to ensure eligible students with

disabilities get an adequate education. The Florida Department of Education is the entity responsible for overseeing the funding for SPED (Brown, Felecia, 2023).

School Facility Funding

Urban schools usually have more modern buildings, better libraries, fully equipped sports facilities, and the funds to support them. Suburban schools have adequate facilities at best. Their budget for facilities is smaller than in urban areas. They tend to get significant support from donations. Rural areas generally have outdated buildings and security features that expose them more to outside threats. The funding for facilities in all three areas comes from local state funding. It does depend on the needs of the district. Unfortunately, larger communities receive most of the funds for the facility's budget (Picus, 2020).

Professional Development Funding

The quality of teachers and their skill set influences the effectiveness of the lessons taught to the students in each geographical setting. Often in an urban area, they have a larger pool of candidates to select from, giving them an advantage. In suburban and rural areas, the candidate pool is smaller, but the quality of teachers is better because of longevity. Regarding professional development, urban areas have an advantage due to a larger budget (Picus, 2020). In most cases, they can provide more courses and better training that reaches more teachers. They can also benefit from peer-to-peer training, such as instructional coaches and mentors for new teachers. Suburban schools generally have less turnover, making their workforce more stable. Although their professional development may not include career growth opportunities, many of their teachers provide a quality education because they have been doing it for much longer. Their experience level is an advantage for suburban and rural schools. Rural schools have

different challenges because they have limited professional growth opportunities. They cannot afford to send several teachers to professional development training. More often than not, they will send one or two teachers to training and have those teachers come back and train everyone else. This can lead to miss information being shared with all teachers equally.

Conclusion

In conclusion, each urban, suburban, and rural school system faces challenges. They also have advantages that set them apart. It depends on what is available in your districts and the choice of where someone lives. They each have unique characteristics, and conversely, they serve specific cultures. Urban schools serve a larger population of students, and it stands to reason that is why their budget is more significant. They can benefit from more funding, provide better resources, and more up-to-date technology. Suburban schools have fewer opportunities as far as funding than urban areas. However, they have less hierarchal challenges when it comes to spending funds. Rural areas have even fewer challenges as it relates to spending funds. Conversely, their budget is a lot less as well. Regardless of which area a school is located in geographically, the fiscal financial budget has to be appropriately managed to provide every student the best opportunity for quality education.

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