

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 282 346

EA 019 450

AUTHOR Nelson, Erik
TITLE School Consolidation. ERIC Digest, Number Thirteen.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, Eugene, Oreg.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 85
CONTRACT 400-83-0013
NOTE 4p.
AVAILABLE FROM Publication Sales, ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, University of Oregon, 1787 Agate Street, Eugene, OR 97403 (free).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Consolidated Schools; Cost Effectiveness; Educational Economics; Elementary Secondary Education; Enrollment; School Community Relationship; *School District Reorganization; *School District Size; School Funds; *School Size; School Zoning
IDENTIFIERS ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

Because larger schools offer advantages such as a greater variety of activities, economic efficiency, and a sense of identity in the community, schools are often combined. Beyond these positive effects, however, school consolidation has some negative aspects. These liabilities include less human contact, less input from teachers in decision-making, and fewer opportunities for change. Moreover, when a school is the only source of community services, its closure has a devastating impact after consolidation. Thus, the welfare of the community should be considered before making the decision to consolidate. (RG)

 * Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
 * from the original document. *

ED282346

SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

EA 019 450

SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION

School consolidation is the practice of combining two or more schools for educational or economic benefits. A consolidated school can offer an expanded curriculum and a more prominent identity in the community while reducing costs through economy of scale. On the other hand, consolidation can incur numerous liabilities, especially if the schools to be closed are the sole providers of community services.

How prevalent is school consolidation?

The trend toward consolidation of one-room schools began in 1918 as a reaction to perceived academic weaknesses in rural and small schools. Statistics reveal the tremendous rate of school consolidations. Ravitch (1984) reports that, while total enrollment in elementary and secondary schools nearly doubled from 1945 to 1980 (from 23 million to 40 million), the number of schools dropped from 185,000 to under 86,000. During the 1970s the number of schools in the country declined 5 percent.

What factors contribute to consolidation?

School consolidations have been justified on two primary grounds: the "bigger is better" philosophy and economic efficiency. The most powerful inducement for school consolidation is the claim that one big school is better than two smaller schools; bigger schools provide a wider range of curricular and extracurricular offerings.

Because school systems seldom have enough money, arguments based on economic efficiency have also been a powerful force propelling the school consolidation movement. In recent years, declining enrollments have been a further incentive for consolidation.

What are the positive effects of school consolidation?

Consolidation of schools has both curricular and financial advantages. First, it often

enables the consolidated schools to share courses and facilities. Sharing results in a more varied curriculum because fewer classes are dropped due to low enrollment. Expenditures for capital improvements and basic maintenance are reduced because there is no need to upgrade or maintain duplicate facilities.

Because consolidation often combines classes and increases their size, fewer teachers need to be employed. Consolidated schools, moreover, do not normally employ as many administrative personnel as did the separate schools.

Consolidation of schools can also produce psychological benefits. When combined, schools often gain a confidence and an identity in the community they did not previously possess (Kay). Sports programs and extracurricular activities flourish in consolidated schools because of combined funding.

What are the liabilities of consolidation?

Some educators (for example, Beckner and O'Neal) stress the benefits of small schools and, thus, question the effectiveness of school consolidations. They suggest that small schools are able to perform functions that are impossible in larger schools. Small schools usually provide closer relations between faculty and administration, a smaller teacher-pupil ratio, and an enhanced potential for individualized instruction.

Opponents of school consolidation suggest that combining schools often produces more harm than good:

1. more red tape
2. less participation in decision-making by teachers and administrators
3. more tension between teachers and students
4. fewer situations for bringing about change
5. more time, effort, money devoted to discipline problems
6. less parent-teacher involvement
7. less human contact, producing frustration and alienation and weakening morale of both students and school staff

What factors should be considered before consolidation?

According to Kay, a leading research analyst in the school consolidation field, a school system "considering consolidation ought to investigate the nature, extent, and strength of other community institutions and social service agencies serving any community facing possible loss of its schools."

In places where the school is the sole source of community services, loss of the schools would be greatly felt. School officials in such cases should be reluctant to consolidate. Conversely, communities with strong networks of organizations and facilities are better equipped to withstand the loss of schools through consolidation.

Finally, only discussion and debate can determine the proper weight given to all elements of the consolidation issue. Concerns for economic efficiency and school size must not outweigh the effect of school consolidation on the community. Only by granting equal importance to all the major factors can decision-makers ensure that "narrow concerns about formal schooling do not unconsciously override broader educational concerns and the general well being of the community to which those broader educational concerns are intimately connected" (Kay).

RESOURCES

- Beckner, Weldon, and O'Neal, Linda. "A New View of Smaller Schools." *NASSP Bulletin* 64 (October 1980): 1-7. EJ 232 066.
- Brantley, William E. "Consolidating High Schools: One District's Answer." *Spectrum* 1 (Spring 1983): 15-22. EJ 295 007.
- Burlingame, Martin. *Declining Enrollments and Small Rural Cities and Districts: An Exploratory Analysis*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, March 27-31, 1978. ED 151 127.
- Cuban, Larry. "Shrinking Enrollment and Consolidation: Political and Organizational Impacts in Arlington, Virginia 1973-78." *Education and Urban Society* 11 (May 1979): 367-95. EJ 205 701.
- Greene, Robert T., and others. "Richmond's Progressive Solution to Declining Enrollments." *Phi Delta Kappan* 61 (May 1980): 616-17. EJ 221 592.
- Kay, Steve. "Considerations in Evaluating School Consolidation Proposals." *Small School Forum* 4 (Fall 1982): 8-10. EJ 273 107.
- Ravitch, Diane. "What We've Accomplished Since WWII." *Principal* 63 (January 1984): 7-13. EJ 294 84.

ERIC DIGEST, Number Thirteen

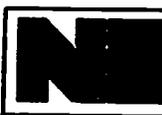
Prepared by Erik Nelson, Research Analyst

A product of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management

College of Education, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403

1985

 This publication was prepared with funding from the National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Education under contract no. 400-83-0013. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of NIE or the Department of Education.