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ABSTRACT

In past decades communities regionalized their high school districts to overcome size limitations. Now, community growth, changes in property values, and concern with self-governance have prompted interest in deregionalization. This is the study of a constituent community's desire to withdraw from a regional district. The study has four purposes--to assess the comparative distribution of educational resources among the three high schools in the regional district; to determine the relationship between the present status of educational resources and a desirable level indicated by the needs of the students of the study district; to examine the extent to which the present methods of governance have been sensitive to the study district's needs; and to assess current cost and the projected cost level under the proposed deregionalization plan to ascertain the cost-effectiveness of withdrawing from the regional district. Findings indicate that the community's high school is receiving less than an equitable share of resources; that district governance and community noncooperation will not allow this situation to be rectified; and that deregionalized school operation need not necessitate additional costs. (Author/IRT)

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A Study of the Deregionalization of a High School District*
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A regional school district represents an attempt by a two or more municipalities to pool their educational efforts and resources to produce a more efficient school system. When neither community is large enough to support or fill its own schools, as was true in many rural areas of New Jersey in the two decades following the second world war, regionalization represented an optional strategy, particularly at the high school level, and limited purpose regional districts proliferated.

Many of the State's rural farming areas are now becoming suburbanized with the increasing encroachment of highways, housing developments and shopping centers. The differential growth of adjacent communities has become the rule rather than the exception based on different zoning laws, land interests and the placement of roads. Differential growth places an increasing strain on regional districts since taxpayers find themselves in the position of having to increasingly contribute to the expense of educating students in communities other than their own. Today, in a tight money market characterized by cutbacks and "belt tightening," many regional districts are finding it impossible to gain the support they need from their constituencies to grow in accord with the differential growth rates of their sending districts.

The case we are about to document in detail represents the first attempt in the State for a sending district to withdraw from a regional district, and, in so withdrawing, to take one of the district's three high schools with it. The district choosing to withdraw and convert its present K-8 district to a K-12 district, is one of five communities comprising the Regional High School District. Moreover, Sending District, as we shall refer to it hereafter, is by far the fastest growing of the five municipalities. Its high school population is projected to increase by one-third in the next five years while the remaining communities expect gains or losses of between +10% in high school populations. As its current high school student body (students in what we shall refer to as Sending District's High School) has expanded to overcrowd its building (relative to Regional Highs #2 and #3), the taxpayers in the other municipalities have repeatedly voted down bond issues aimed at expanding the building. Faced with the prospect of a reduction in educational quality based on insufficient facilities, Sending District undertook steps to withdraw from the Regional High School District. An early step was to sponsor this study in an attempt to document the educational opportunities (or their lack) available to its high school students within the Regional District.

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Purposes:

The purposes of the study were as follows:

- 1) to assess the comparative deployment or distribution of educational resources among the three high schools in the regional district to determine relative equalities and inequalities, that is, to see if Sending District's High School was receiving an equal share;
- 2) to determine the relationship between present status of educational resources and a desirable level indicated by the needs of students of Sending District;
- 3) to examine the extent to which the present method of governance has been sensitive to Sending District's needs;
- 4) to assess current costs and projected costs levels under the proposed deregionalization plan to ascertain the cost effectiveness of withdrawing from the regional district.

The Sending District

In the mid 1950's, Sending District was a large rural area without sufficient resources and pupil population to support its own high school. Unable to find enough room for its high school pupils in the surrounding communities, Sending District entered into a limited purpose regional high school relationship with six surrounding municipalities. In 1958, when the regional district was first formed there were 250 Sending District high school students. The number of high school pupils has steadily increased to over 1,100 pupils in 1977-78 and is projected to increase to over 1,600 by 1981-82.

Sending District is one of the fastest growing communities in the State. The Township's 31.6 square miles is still mostly underdeveloped and presently supports a population of 17,223 with 3,378 K-8 pupils enrolled in 9 elementary and one middle school. Traversed by two newly completed super highways, the Township's population is expected to grow to almost 42,000 by the early 1980's.



The Law

In the 1950's, limited purpose regional school districts were a viable management and organizational unit. However, by the mid 1970's, many of the circumstances that had originally prompted this form of school organization no longer existed. In 1974, then Assemblyman, Morton Salkind, District II, Monmouth County, New Jersey, introduced (Bill A-825) an act authorizing and providing a procedure for communities to withdraw from a limited purpose regional school district. At the time Assembly Bill Number #825 was approved in March 1976, there were 67 limited purpose regional school districts in New Jersey.

In effect, the new law afforded constituent districts in a limited purpose regional district a procedure for deregionalization. This procedure requires:

- 1) An application by the withdrawing district to the county Superintendent to make an investigation as to the advisability of withdrawal.
- 2) The county Superintendent must file a report containing information in order to form judgments concerning the advisability of such withdrawal.
- 3) A petition on the part of a withdrawing constituent district must be sent to the Commissioner to submit the issue to the legal voters of all the constituent districts.
- 4) An answer on behalf of the municipalities and remaining constituent districts must be with regard to the withdrawing district's petition.
- 5) The Commissioner of Education must submit the petition and answers to a board of review to determine if the petition should be granted, the amount of assumed indebtedness, and to decide to schedule and hold a public hearing based on the effect of the proposed withdrawal upon the educational and financial condition of the withdrawing and remaining districts.

Consent to schedule and hold a public hearing and referendum is to be granted by the Commissioner of Education unless:

- 1) there is an excessive debt burden upon the remaining or withdrawing district;
- 2) an efficient school system could not be maintained in the remaining districts or the withdrawing districts without excess costs;
- 3) insufficient pupils would be left in the remaining districts to maintain a properly graded school system; or
- 4) any other reason, which it may deem to be sufficient.



The Mancuso Report

The validity of the withdrawing petition rests primarily on the prediction of efficient school management units after withdrawal. Overall, there is little definitive research on what constitutes an efficient school management unit. The most complete and detailed study of school district efficiency in relation to school district scope and size was prepared by the "Committee to Study The Next Steps of Regionalization and Consolidation in the School Districts of New Jersey." The Report, also known as the Mancuso Report, was published in 1969 and makes the following relevant recommendations:

- 1) School districts in New Jersey should be organized on a K-12 and eventually an N-12 basis to provide a comprehensive, quality education for all pupils.
- 2) Constituent districts of regionals or districts with sending - receiving relationship should be reorganized as K-12 districts.
- 3) The comprehensive K-12 district should have a minimum enrollment of 3,500 pupils.
- 4) Each newly created K-12 district should reflect, as nearly as practicable, the natural geographic, social and economic community.
- 5) Legislation should be enacted to permit the dissolution of existing limited regional school districts.

Methodology

Methodology involved the collection and analysis of data obtained from official school records. One aspect in the analysis of this data involved the comparative deployment and distribution of educational resources among the three high schools in the regional districts. Specifically, this involved a comparative examination of the following indicators of educational resource:

- 1) a comparison of selected personnel variables among the three high schools including the average years of administrator's, guidance staff, and teacher's "in-district" experience, the average years of total teaching experience, the average number of credits of teacher's training beyond certification, and the average number of pupils per teacher (see Table 1);

Methodology (continued)

- 2) a comparison of facility use among the three high schools including the average number of students per room per period, the number of periods each room is in use each day, and the number of periods per day each room's capacity exceeds the State's recommended level (see Table 2);
- 3) a comparison of selected program variables among the three high schools including the number of courses listed, the number of courses offered in 1976-77, the average weekly student contact hours in the practical arts and physical education, and student participation in inter-scholastic athletic and non-athletic extracurricular activities (see Table 3);
- 4) a comparison of instructional equipment among the three high schools in selected curriculum areas including physical education, business education and audio-visual apparatus (see Table 4);
- 5) a comparison of per pupil budget allocations for instructional programs among the three high schools including materials and capital outlay for 1976-77 and 1977-78 school year (see Table 5).

In addition, the methodology for this study included an analysis of the needs of the students among the three high schools and an examination of the extent to which the regional form of governance has been sensitive to Sending District's needs. Specifically, this involved an examination of the following indicators of need:

- 1) a comparison of test and performance characteristics among the three high schools including 4th, 7th and 10th grade reading and mathematics scores, the average SAT verbal and mathematics scores, and the number of pupils applying to 2 and 4 year colleges for the 1976-77 school year (see Table 6);
- 2) rank-order correlations between goal rankings by students, community and staff in Sending District and the three regional high schools (see Table 7);
- 3) the ratio of support for nine referenda by community (see Table 8);

Finally, the methodology for this study included an analysis of the current costs under regionalization and projected costs under deregionalization in order to assess cost effectiveness of withdrawing from the regional district (see Table 9).



Results

- 1) Sending District's High School has the least experienced teaching personnel both in terms of local district service and total teaching experience; moreover, Sending District's teachers having the least amount of advanced training, are required to teach the largest classes in the Regional District. Sending District's High School also has the least experienced administrators and supervisory personnel compared to either Regional High School #2 or #3 (See Table 1)
- 2) Sending District's High School building facility, apart from its generally recognized design deficiencies,* is clearly the most heavily used and overused of the three buildings.

Instructional rooms are in use an average of 87% of the school day (compared to 75% for Regional High School #3 and 69% for Regional High School #2) with one-third of its rooms in use 100% of the school day. This exceeds the State guideline of 30% maximum use and creates serious problems for flexibility of scheduling. The building is beyond its comfortable and reasonable use limit and must be expanded to meet current and expected educational needs. (See Table 2)

- 3) a. While program offerings in the three high schools are similar, Regional High #3's program is clearly the most diversified while Regional #2's appears strongest in non-academic areas. Sending District's lack the distinction of being either most varied or most complete in either academic or non-academic areas. (See Table 3)
- b. In co-curricular activities, Regional High #3 has the greatest percentage of student participation with Sending District's in the middle and Regional #2 lowest.
- c. Curiously, Sending District's students get one hour a week less in home economics and industrial arts instruction and 18 minutes a week less of gym. Presumably, this cutting back in instructional time is based on limited facilities.
- 4) The distribution of physical education, business education and audio-visual equipment among the three high schools as evidenced in their teacher inventories shows that (1) Sending District's High, without any gymnastics equipment is a poor third in physical education; (2) Sending District's is second to Regional #2 in business education but its number of electric typewriters, 26, is no greater than that of Regional #3 and only about a fourth that of Regional #2; (3) Sending District's has the most audio-visual equipment if projector screens are included; without their 31 screens, Sending District's drops to second. Hence, Sending District's High, overall, seems to be behind the other two schools in these equipment areas. (See Table 4)

* We did not attempt to describe this deficiency in detail as this was well documented in The Commission on Secondary Schools-Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools Report of April 9, 1976.

Results (continued)

- 5) While last year's combined operating and capital budget outlays per student for instruction were roughly comparable among the three high schools (with Regional #2's being somewhat lower), this year's budget shows a decided alteration with Regional #2's budget going up 12% (to compensate partly for this year) Regional #3's is going down by 13% and Sending District's going down by 28%. Sending District's resulting budget will be 14% lower than Regional #2's and 20% lower than Regional #3's. Sending District's High will be getting the lowest share of the three schools. (See Table 5.)
- 6) As reflected on a variety of test measures, Regional High #3's students and Regional High #2's students are different in capability and need from those of Sending District's High. #3's students score about 9% higher and #2's students 7% higher than Sending District's students on tests and both are more 4-year college oriented and less 2-year college oriented than Sending District's. Similarly, differences are found in the sending districts, except Sending District's scores exceed those of the districts sending to Regional #2 when the latter are combined. Why these differences reverse themselves at the high school level may be reflection of Sending District's secondary program. (See Table 6.)
- 7) Educational (T&E) goal rankings by the three high schools are highly similar, more similar to one another than any of the three are to Sending District-reflecting perhaps a basic difference between elementary level and secondary level concerns. The only areas where the three high schools depart are those relating to jobs where ranking by community members for Sending District's High tend to be higher than for the other two high schools. (See Table 7.)
- 8) a. Sending District has had a high level of direct participatory governance; their rate of referendum support for the regional district's building program has been 67%. This is the highest support rate among the constituent districts. Although the Sending District community has shown a willingness to support a quality school program, this support has often been nullified by the lack of support by the other four communities. (See Table 8.)
b. While the Sending District community is represented by three members on the Regional Board of Education, a high turnover and absentee rate has resulted in a lack of continuity and effective representative governance.
- 9) An analysis of current and projected operational costs shows that a K-12 district organization would result in considerable cost savings in the areas of transportation and administration over current regional district costs. The indeterminate area is in professional salaries where the costs are a function of the salary schedule adopted. Using the K-8 district salary schedule would result in a substantial savings; using the regional district guide would lead to higher costs. There is a point in the middle where costs would remain the same. (See Table 9.)

Conclusions

- 1) Education in a K-12 district has the potential to be more comprehensive and coordinated and to more likely meet the needs of its student population than education in a district, like a regionalized one, which fragments the school years.

The conclusion is drawn from an extensive report prepared in 1969 for the New Jersey State Department of Education. Following an examination of education in the State and Nation, Mrs. Ruth Mancuso and her committee came to the above conclusion and strongly urged the State to pass legislation to facilitate de-regionalization. (It was subsequently passed.) The K-12 organizational arrangement was found to be the most likely, of all organizational arrangements, to foster educational excellence.

- 2) Considering personnel, facilities, programs, equipment and budget allocations- all of which represent the distribution of resources in the Regional School District- Sending District's High School is at a decided disadvantage. Of the three high schools, Sending District's High School has the least experienced teaching, administrative and services staff, with the least amount of advanced training, the most overused classrooms, shops and labs, the least diverse curriculum offerings, the least equipment, and the lowest per student instruction budget for the coming year. Why and how this situation developed and who is responsible for it are questions that can only be partially answered in terms of District governance. In point of fact, the District, regardless or in spite of its intentions, has not enabled Sending District's High School to meet the needs of its students. The data presented in this report strongly support the conclusion that Sending District's High School has been placed in a clearly unfavorable position.

- 3) The student bodies of the three high schools differ in educationally-important ways. These differences have not been clearly responded to in the management of the District. Sending District's student body has a more vocational and practical orientation than students in the other two high schools yet the needs of Sending District's students have not produced an educational orientation designed to meet them. Conditions of crowding and building design and utilization may be partly responsible but limited offerings and equipment may reflect a lack of sensitivity to differing student needs. The District is primarily oriented toward preparing students for 4-year college in all three high schools although this is not the primary need among the Sending District's student population.

- 4) Based on Board membership turnover and absentee rate and the unwillingness of the communities to support one another, Sending District cannot effectively control the quality of education for its own high school pupils. Sending District is sorely in need of additional high school facilities but does not seem likely to get them since the District functions neither in an effective contiguous manner-that is, dealing equitably with total district needs-nor in an effective decentralized manner-that is, each community having effective representation. Because of high turnover and absenteeism, the Board cannot truly represent the needs of each community and negotiate to make.

Conclusions (continued)

decisions as a confederation of districts. Because of an apparent unwillingness of communities to contribute financially to one another's needs, the Board cannot make the moves required to provide Sending District with effective education. Hence, the limited regionalization approach has placed the participating communities, particularly Sending District at this point, in a "Catch-22" position of not being able to meet its educational needs while these needs continue to visibly grow. The regional district administration, aware of these needs, is not able to make sufficient moves to meet them primarily because of the governance mechanisms described above.

- 5) It is possible to operate the K-12 district if formed in Sending District at (equal or) reduced costs to the taxpayer from those entailed by a separation of elementary and secondary education facilities. A K-12 district would yield a savings in the (1) cost of transporting students to and from school (based on double bus runs) and (2) cost of administration (based on fewer central office staff members) than the regionalized approach. As for salaries, costs will go up or down depending on the salary guide that the K-12 district adopted. Even if additional salary costs occur, that would be counterbalanced by savings in the other two areas. If professional salary costs go down or stay the same, the net result will be a savings to the taxpayer.

Recommendations

- 1) Sending District should withdraw from the Regional School District. Conclusions indicate that resource distribution among the three high schools is not equitable and governance procedures make it unlikely that these differences can be resolved and Sending District's needs met within the regional district. The greater likelihood for a building program and more resources for Sending District's students is in a community-based and run K-12 district.
- 2) Upon withdrawal, Sending District should make immediate plans to expand or enlarge upon the secondary school facilities. Sending District's High School facility has exceeded its educationally sound limit of enrollment. The highest priority must be the immediate acquisition of additional instructional space to keep from having further program, schedule and service limitations.
- 3) As teaching and administrative positions become available in the high school, Sending District's Board should seek candidates with experience and advanced training. The current high school staff is relatively inexperienced (science being a particular case in point). This situation is compounded by the lack of experience in leadership and supervisory positions. As vacancies occur, more experienced people should be sought.



Recommendations (continued)

- 4) Sending District's Board should attempt to create conditions that will minimize the tendency for more experienced teachers to leave the high school and stay with the regional district after the withdrawal. The "bumping" phenomenon will be influenced by salary schedules, conditions of employment and levels of uncertainty and anxiety. To retain those teachers who have the seniority to leave, Sending District's Board must act quickly upon resolution of the withdrawal request to present to the staff of Sending District's High School a set of conditions that will be acceptable and attractive to both the community and the staff.
- 5) Other than to expand instructional time in current related arts and physical education areas, the program of instruction at Sending District's High should not be changed until (1) the facilities problem has been rectified and (2) the new Board has had sufficient time to study and understand secondary school needs. Ultimately, however, it would be desirable for the program of studies at Sending District's High to more closely fit the needs of the student body than is currently the case.
- 6) The Sending District's Board of Education should institute a standard district wide and centralized procedure to assess the current status of equipment and supply inventories. It has been difficult to assess the current status, condition, and use of instructional equipment and supplies in Sending District's High School because there is a lack of continuity in the record keeping procedure based on a non-standardized format. This happens because the accountability for assigned equipment and the records relating to the quantity and quality of the equipment is delegated to several individuals who often use various self-designed forms. In addition, there were no supply records available for either a central location or individual rooms.
- 7) In negotiating a new salary guide for teachers in a K-12 district, the Sending District's Board should seek a level between the 9-12 salary guide and K-8 salary guide where, given a maximum of bumping, the net costs for salaries in the combined K-12 district will be the same as for the two districts separately. In order for a saving in operational costs to occur, salary costs must not increase substantially. Accepting the regional district's salary guide would result in a substantial increase in costs at the K-8 level (since all teachers in a district operates on the same guide). Therefore, a Board would do well to try for a compromise between the two guides such that net costs for salaries would remain the same. Then, other areas of saving (i.e., transportation, administration) would yield overall net reduction in costs.

Epilogue

On December 6, 1977, Sending District and the Districts comprising the Regional High School District voted overwhelmingly to deregionalize. Sending District's voters voted 1,595 to 260 in favor of deregionalization; voters in the communities sending to Regional High #2 voted 636 to 71 in favor; voters in communities sending to Regional High #3 voted 940 to 17 in favor. The result enables Sending District to become a K-12 district with the addition of Sending District's High School. Regional District continues as a two high school district with three sending communities.

Prior to the vote innumerable public meetings were held in all the sending communities. Regional's Board endorsed deregionalization and Regional's superintendent remained staunchly neutral. Sending District's superintendent played a strong advocacy role as did Sending District's Board. Audits conducted for both Boards showed that taxpayers would profit handsomely by deregionalization. Whether, in fact, Sending District can operate its own high school less expensively than did Regional will depend on numerous factors such as the salary guide ultimately adopted and the cost of a new building program promised by Sending District's superintendent. Sending District will soon be in control of its own high school education. Whether they can fulfill the promise of its improvement, only time will tell.

Table 1

A Comparison of Administrator's and Teacher's Backgrounds in Regional District's Three High Schools

	Sending District's High	Regional High #2	Regional High #3
Average years of Administrator's Experience	3.1	5.9	6.3
Average years of Guidance Staff Experience	4.7	7.8	6.8
Average years of Teacher's Experience in District	5.0	7.5	6.6
Average years of Teacher's Total Experience	7.6	10.6	9.8
Average Credits of Teacher's Training Beyond Certification	17.3	24.9	26.1
Average Number of Pupils per Teacher	22.1	21.2	20.8

Table 2

A Comparison of Facility Use in Regional District's Three High Schools

	Sending District's High	Regional High #2	Regional High #3
Actual Capacity ¹	21.5	21.3	19.5
Room Utilization Rate ²	.87	.69	.75
Room Overutilization Rate ³	37%	33%	27%

1 Average number of students per room per period used.

2 Number of periods room is used divided by number of daily periods.

3 Percent of periods of room use where number of students in room exceeds the number recommended by the State per square foot.

Table 3

A Comparison of Program Offerings in Regional District's Three High Schools

	Sending District's High School	Regional High #2	Regional High #3
Number of Courses Listed	183	175	219
Number of Courses Offered	86	105	88
Weekly contact hours in Home Economics & Industrial Arts	2½ hrs.	3½ hrs.	3½ hrs.
Weekly contact hours in Physical Education	2½ hrs.	24/5 hrs.	24/5 hrs.
Ratio of Students Participating in Interscholastic Athletics & Total Student Enrollment	.55	.40	.57
Ratio of Students Participating in Extra-curricular Activities & Total Student Enrollment	.52	.32	.76

Table 4

A Comparison of the Number of Pieces of Equipment in Selected Areas in
Regional District's Three High Schools

	Sending District's High School	Regional High #2	Regional High #3
Physical Education	26	80	107
Business Education	87	187	46
Electric Typewriters	26	98	26
Audio-visual*	155	120	170

* Excluding wall projector screens.

Table 5

A Comparison of Per Pupil Budget Allocations for Instructional Programs
(Exclusive of Salaries) in Regional District's Three High Schools

	Sending District's High School	Regional High #2	Regional High #3
1976-77 Materials, etc.	\$323.14	\$273.78	\$325.29
1976-77 Capital Outlay	\$ 56.86	\$ 6.25	\$ 72.25
1976-77 Total	\$380.00	\$280.00	\$397.54
1977-78 Materials, etc.	\$251.28	\$310.54	\$334.91
1977-78 Capital Outlay	\$22.61	\$ 9.42	\$ 9.10
1977-78 Total	\$273.89	\$319.96	\$344.01

Table 6

A Comparison of Test and Performance Characteristics of Regional District's
Three High Schools

	Sending District's High School	Regional High #2	Regional High #3
4th Grade Reading & Math Scores For Sending District's	94.1	88.7	96.9
7th Grade Reading & Math Scores For Sending District's	80.1	79.3	90.2
10th Grade Reading & Math Scores	79.3	84.9	86.0
SAT - Verbal & Math	878	936	974
Applied to 4 yr. College	33%	50%	63%
Applied to 2 yr. College	31%	17%	15%

Table 7

Rank-Order Correlations Between Goal Rankings by Students, Community & Staff in Sending District and the Three Regional High Schools

	Sending District's High School	Regional High #2	Regional High #3
Sending District	.69	.64	.62
Sending District's High		.94	.95
Regional High #2			.97

Table 8

Ratios of Referendum Support (Number Voting "yes" Divided by Number Voting) By the Sending Districts*

Sending District	Communities Sending to Regional High #2	Communities Sending to Regional High #3
.67	.17	.50

* For nine referenda, two for Regional High #2 and seven for Sending District's High.

Table 9

Projected Cost Differences for the Operation of Sending District's High School by Sending District in Comparison to Regional District

Professional Salaries Using	Sending District's Guide	Administration	Transportation
Regional's Guide			
+\$225,000	-\$349,000	-\$78,000	-\$22,000

Minus sign (-) constitutes a savings under deregionalization.