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ABSTRACT

Dissatisfaction with the quality of education in large elementary and secondary schools has been one of the factors leading to rediscovery of the small school in America. The question is whether small schools are truly better places for educating elementary and secondary students. Although often viewed as being essentially rural in nature, small schools are found in metropolitan areas as well and may include religious schools, prep schools, American Indian schools, and alternative schools. Student enrollment, geographical location, organizational type and funding sources are all factors that must be considered in the study of small schools and their effectiveness. Small schools are often accused of being less efficient than large schools due to their inability to: make quantity purchases, distribute administrative costs, and provide specialized programs. However, a number of studies indicate the following benefits: (1) small school size has a positive influence on student achievement; (2) students of small schools assume more responsible and important positions within a wider range of activities than do their large school counterparts; and (3) there is greater opportunity for interaction, communication, and individual attention afforded small school students and teachers. (DS)

America's Small Schools

AMERICA'S SMALL SCHOOLS

by

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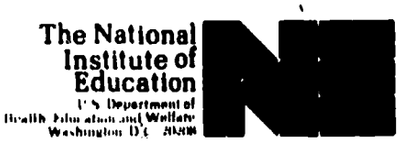

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Abstract

Americans, it seems, have rediscovered the small school. The literature on the values and strengths of small schools has steadily increased over the past five years. Part of this attention toward smallness appears to be the result of dissatisfaction with the quality of education in large elementary and secondary schools. Are small schools better places for educating elementary and secondary students, or have Americans merely exchanged their one-time infatuation with the "big to small" as a solution for improving the quality of education? This monograph examines some of the characteristics of small schools such as enrollment size, geographical location, and organizational structure. By focusing on these factors it becomes somewhat easier to identify some of the complexities in characterizing schools as "small" and consequently, determining what are their strengths and weaknesses.

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CONTENTS

Chapter 1

DEFINING THE SMALL SCHOOL

Introduction

Americans, it seems, have rediscovered the small school. The literature on the values and strengths of small schools has steadily increased over the past five years. Perhaps part of this attention toward smallness is the result of dissatisfaction with the quality of education in large elementary and secondary schools. It is the "largeness" of comprehensive high schools that is seen as contributing to problems of declining test scores and increasing violence and alienation among adolescents (Wynn, 1978: pp. 307-315). Inherent in these criticisms toward bigness is the belief that restructuring schools to smaller entities will ameliorate some of the major educational problems of today.

Are small schools "better" places for educating elementary and secondary school students? Or have Americans merely exchanged their one-time infatuation with "big to small" as a solution for improving the quality of education? Are there concrete examples that indicate the educational benefits and values of small schools? One way to begin answering these questions would be to define what characteristics describe a small school.

Characteristics of Small Schools

Part of the difficulty in identifying what is a "small school" relates to some commonly held assumptions concerning characteristics of schools. Small schools are usually viewed as being synonymous with rural schools. However, there are various types of schools that could be classified as small. It is therefore somewhat easier to dispel some of the images associated with small schools by examining several factors such as enrollment size, geographical location, funding structure and client groups. By focusing on these factors one can begin to identify some of the complexities in characterizing schools as "small" and consequently, determining what are their strengths and weaknesses.

School Size

School enrollment size has been the major criterion for identifying small schools. Arguments over what enrollment figure should be used to determine "small" have persisted over the past several decades. (Callahan 1962; Conant 1959; Sher, 1977) More recently the North Central Association Committee on Small Schools defines small high schools as those schools having total student enrollments of less than 300 for grades nine through twelve. (North Central Assocation of Colleges and Schools, 1974: p. 2) The Association does not, however, define a size criterion for identifying small elementary schools. The National Center for Educational Statistics uses school system enrollment size to differentiate among systems. (See Table 1) The latest national census data indicates that there are 5,800 schools within public school systems having student enrollments totaling under 300 students. (Table 1)

Table 1

NUMBER OF PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEMS, NUMBER OF SCHOOLS, AND NUMBER OF PUPILS ENROLLED BY SIZE OF SYSTEM: FALL 1977

Enrollment Size of System	School Systems		Schools		Pupils Enrolled	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number in Thousands	Percent
TOTAL	16,112	100.0	87,315	100.0	43,444	100.0
25,000 or more	187	1.2	16,785	19.2	12,162	28.0
10,000 to 24,999	530	3.3	12.525	14.3	7,686	17.7
5,000 to 9,999	1,104	6.9	13,635	15.6	7,704	17.7
2,500 to 4,999	2,067	12.8	14,651	16.8	7,223	16.6
1,000 to 2,499	3,463	21.5	14,047	16.1	5,670	13.1
600 to 999	1,864	11.6	4,897	5.6	1,465	3.4
300 to 599	2,323	14.4	4,975	5.7	1,019	2.3
1 to 299	4,296	26.7	5,800	6.6	516	1.2
None[1]	278	1.7	0		0	0

[1]Systems not operating schools.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, 1979, and unpublished tabulations.

Using school size as a criterion for identifying small schools presents several problems. First, size is relative. Having to rely on a single number such as 300 to differentiate between large and small is somewhat problematic. Is a school with an enrollment of 299 small and a school with 320 large? It would appear that using one number as the cut-off point is too limiting, especially when considering the size differential from schools with 300 students to schools with enrollments of 1,000. For example, in the mid-sixties, there were schools in New York City with enrollments of 4,000 students. Educational planners are now trying to decentralize the schools into smaller operative units of under 600 students. (Gold, 1975: pp. 313-315) Although twice as large as the North Central Association criteria, these schools are being designed to be nearly seven times smaller than their previous enrollments.

Second, enrollment figures are not stable. Student enrollments tend to fluctuate, sometimes radically during the academic school year. For example, the student enrollments in a rural mining town within one year grew by nearly 500 students. (Ross and Green, 1979: p. 33) Thus a school classified as small in the fall could be classified as large by the spring due to changing migration patterns, court ordered desegregation, and so on.

Third, the organizational patterns of schools are sometimes deceptive in their appearance, and what seems to be a big school may actually be several small schools operating in one large building. For instance, the Whitney Young High School in Chicago and the Wingate High School in Brooklyn appear to be large urban schools. However, these schools are really a magnet complex of several small schools operating independently although

sharing a common roof. Thus, it would seem that solely using one school enrollment size would probably not be the most effective way to distinguish a small school from a large school.

Geographical Location

Another way to identify small schools has been by geographical location. America's small schools are usually thought of being located in rural areas, and, in fact, the majority of the small school literature concentrates on publicly supported rural schools. (Edington, 1976: p. 4) However, small schools are also located in urban and suburban areas throughout the United States and in 22 countries around the world. The American dependent school system enrolls 300 to 800 students in 261 schools at 160 different locations including England, Germany, France, Japan, Canal Zone, Panama, and so on. (Report to the Congress, On the Organization of the Dependents' Education System, 1979: p. 24)

Even if one were to assume that the preponderance of small schools were in rural areas, there are tremendous differences among the geographical areas where small schools are located. For example, there are K-12 schools with fewer than 100 students in isolated communities from the Alaska bush to the Appalachian hollows of Kentucky. However, not all rural schools are located in isolated areas; in some rural school districts, residents are within an hour's commute of a major city.

There are other differences among rural schools. In some areas the school population may be exclusively Caucasian while in others it may include American Indians, blacks and Chicanos. Some schools are in affluent areas serving a community population that has both the resources and desire

to make substantial investments in the educational system. Other schools are located in poor areas with large numbers of the community underemployed and at poverty level. In these areas, the communities often have inadequate revenues to finance their educational needs. Moreover, the enrollment patterns are different. Some of the schools have elementary student enrollments of 300 while others may serve 37 students from grades K-12. Enrollments in rural areas have been particularly unstable because of changing shifts in migration patterns from World War II to the present. (Beale, 1975: p. 3)

The diversity of location and demographic factors among rural schools expands when including small schools in suburban and urban areas. Declining birth rates have plummeted enrollments in some publicly supported suburban and urban school districts substantially changing the size of individual schools. Changes in migration patterns in other areas have created the reverse of this situation. Thus, relying on geographic indicators makes it extremely difficult to isolate where small schools are most likely to be located.

Funding Sources

In addition to enrollment size, another way to identify small schools is to examine how they are supported. Publicly supported small schools tend to include: rural, Indian schools, dependent schools, special schools for the physically and mentally handicapped and alternative schools. The majority of publicly supported elementary and secondary schools in metropolitan areas have average student enrollments over 635 (See Table 2 and Figure 1), while publicly supported alternative schools are usually

Table 2

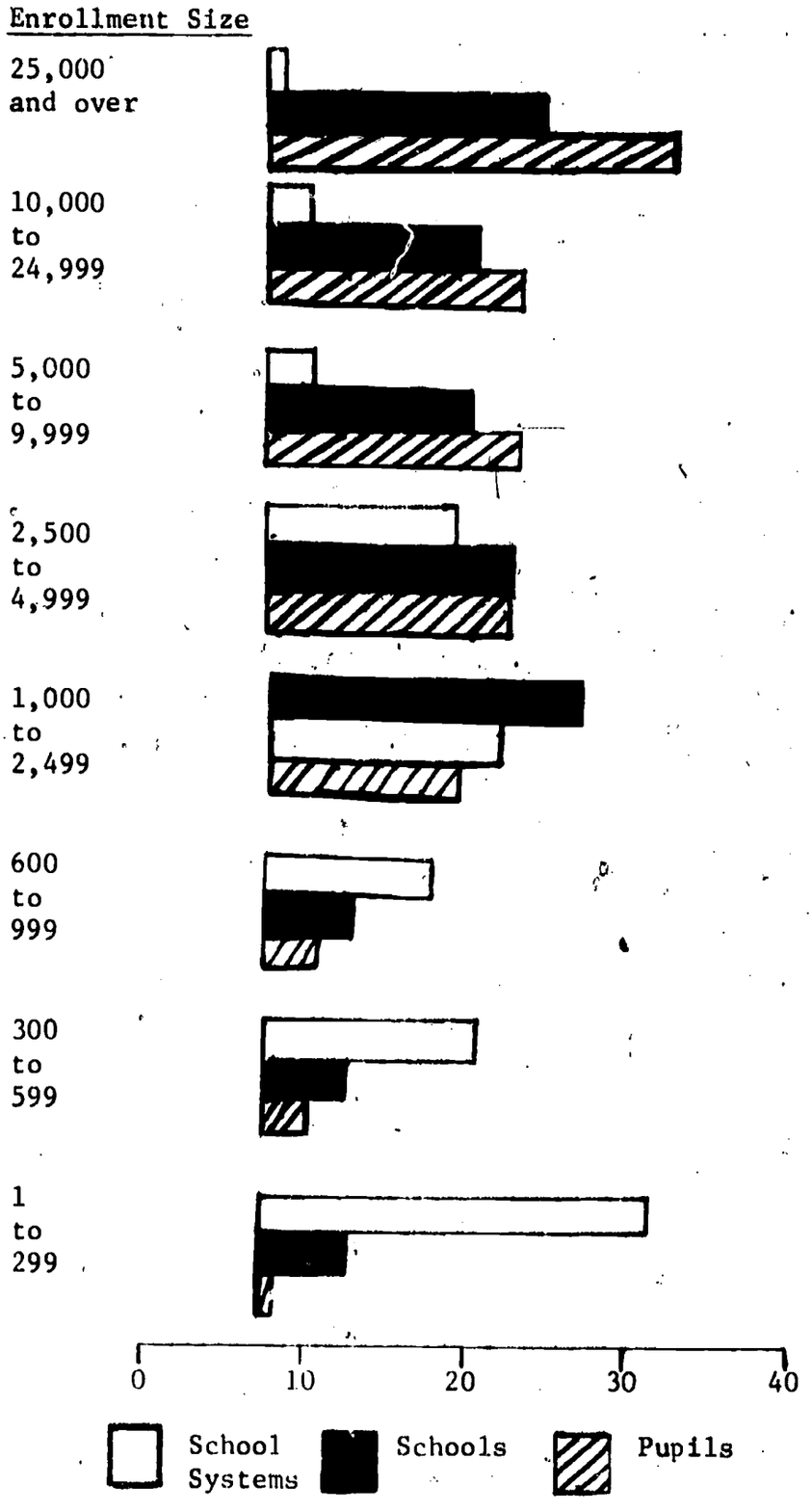
SIZE OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN METROPOLITAN AND NON-METROPOLITAN AREAS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1971-72

Area	Total Enrollment (K-12)	% Total U.S. Enroll.	No. Schl. Districts	Average Schl. Dist. Enrollment	No. of Schools	Average Schl. Enroll.
All Metropolitan Areas of the U.S.	30,408,000	66%	4,781	6,360	47,849	635
All Non-Metropolitan Areas of the U.S.	15,615,000	34%	11,800	1,323	39,544	395
U.S. Total	46,023,000	--	16,581	2,776	87,393	527

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1972 Census of Governments: Governmental Organization (Vol. 1) (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, July 1973), Table 17; also U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Statistics of Local Public School Systems, Pupils, and Staff, Fall, 1971, National Center for Educational Statistics (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), Table A.

Figure 1

SCHOOL SYSTEMS, SCHOOLS, AND PUPILS
BY ENROLLMENT SIZE OF THE SYSTEM



*A. More than one-quarter of the pupils are enrolled in 19.2 % of the schools contained in only 1.2% of the school systems.

**B. More than one-quarter of the school systems in the U.S. contain 6.6% of the schools and enroll only 1.2% of the pupils.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Health, National Center for Education Statistics, The Condition of Education, 1979.

described as having enrollments under 300 (Duke, 1978: p. 466). Privately supported small schools include: religious and nonreligious schools, boarding schools, and academies. The typical private school is a small school and usually it is that way by choice. (Kraushaar, 1972: p. 12) The interrelationship between enrollments and funding sources is important for several reasons.

The sources of income for nonpublic schools have generally come from tuition and fees. Funds are also received from gifts, grants, proceeds from activities such as bazaars, fairs, and so on, income from endowments, and church or parish contributions. (Kraushaar, 1972: p. 203) Revenues derived from tuition and fees can cover from approximately one-fourth to over half the per pupil costs in private religious and independent schools. (Kraushaar, 1972: p. 204-205) Consequently, substantial changes in enrollment would likely affect the survival of a school. Similarly, in public alternative schools, enrollment patterns also determine the survival of a school. The support of alternative schools does not come from tuition, but rather from state aid usually based on average daily attendance and federal aid usually through categorized programs. Without adequate resources and a stable enrollment, alternative schools also find themselves in jeopardy of closing.

The long-run inflation of the last fifteen years, coupled with steadily increasing teacher salaries, declines in gifts and other sharply rising operational costs have forced private and public schools to reassess expenditures and the budget-making process. Despite these pressures, several schools have continued to attract students for a variety of reasons. The following section describes the enrollment trends of privately and publicly

supported small schools and attempts to explain why they have continued to survive during times of severe fiscal constraint.

Privately Supported Small Schools

Religious Schools

Approximately eighty-five percent of all nonpublic schools are church affiliated, and of that group, over three-fourths are Roman Catholic. (Kraushaar, 1972: p. 5) Other religious schools include Lutheran, Episcopal, Friends, Christian Reformed, Seventh Day Adventist and Orthodox Jewish Day Schools. (For a comprehensive history on the development of these private schools, see Kraushaar, 1972: Chapters 2 and 3.)

There have been substantial fluctuations in private school enrollments. (Kraushaar, 1972) However, the greatest number of students attending nonpublic schools peaked in 1965. After the mid-sixties, the private schools, as well as the public schools, were expected to reduce their enrollments considerably. Recently, tabulated data indicate that the enrollments have not decreased as much as predicted. Table 3 describes the nonpublic school group enrollment trends from 1965-1975.

The concentration on enrollments in religious schools is important for several reasons. The typical private religious school is a relatively small school and is that way by choice. Private schools tend to regard "smallness and direct human relations, unburdened by bureaucratic complexities, as essential. The aim is to provide a familial, personalized education under a headmaster or principal who accepts a broad delegation of power." (Kraushaar, 1972: p. 12) Assuming that private schools are small and that student enrollments in public schools are declining, and

Table 3

NONPUBLIC SCHOOL GROUP ENROLLMENT TRENDS, 1965-1975

Nonpublic School Group	Enroll. 1965-66	Enroll. 1970-71	% Change 65/66-70/71	Enroll. 1975-76	% Change 70/71-75/76	% Change 65/66-75-76
Roman Catholic	5,573,810	4,364,000	- 21.7	3,415,000	- 21.7	- 38.7
Lutheran						
Missouri Synod	171,966	163,386	- 5.0	165,604	+ 1.4	- 3.7
Wisconsin Synod	27,488	29,050	+ 5.8	31,183	+ 7.3	+ 13.6
American Lutheran	8,795	9,926	+ 12.9	16,121	+ 62.4	+ 83.3
Seventh Day Adventist	50,465	no data		75,722[d]		+ 50.0
Calvinist (National Union of Christian Schls.)	51,240[a]	51,182	- 0.1	48,585	- 5.1	- 5.2
Evangelical						
National Assoc. of Christian Schools	32,003	50,860	+ 58.9	23,185	- 54.4	- 27.9
Western Assoc. of Christian Schools	11,388	32,327	+183.9	63,131	+ 95.3	+454.4
National Christian School Educ. Assoc[b]				38,175		
American Assoc. of Christian Schools[b]				94,722[c]		
Assembly of God	3,110	7,462	+140.0	21,921	+193.8	+604.9
Jewish Day Schools						
National Society for Hebrew Day Schools (Orthodox)	68,800	75,000	+ 17.6	82,200	+ 9.6	+ 28.8
Solomon Schechter Day Schls. (Conservative)	3,489	6,042	+ 73.2	7,965	+ 31.8	+128.3
Reform Jewish				373		
National Assoc. of Independent Schools	199,329	221,216	+ 11.0	277,406	+ 2.8	+ 14.1
Episcopal Schools						
Parish Day Schools[e]	4,893[a]	4,559[f]	- 6.8	5,536	+ 21.4	+ 13.1
Nonparish Schools[e]	55,060[a]	61,186[f]	+ 11.1	71,020	+ 16.1	+ 29.0
Friends (Quaker) Schools	10,878	13,706	+ 26.0	13,801	+ 0.1	+ 16.6
Military				13,600		
Greek Orthodox		4,468		5,009	+ 12.1	
Mennonite Schools	13,256	7,368	- 44.4	8,079	+ 9.6	- 39.1
Nonpublic Alternative (Free) Schools		13,142		23,498	+ 78.9	

[a] 1966-67.

[b] Founded after 1970.

[c] Data derived from school enrollments reported in the 1975 membership listing. Included student enrollments in regular and affiliate member schools. Number of students in schools holding regular memberships: 49,324.

[d] 1974-75.

[e] Includes enrollments (including preschool enrollments) in schools offering some post-kindergarten education.

[f] 1969-79.

given the problems of recent inflation, why have parents continued to send their children to private schools?

Erickson (1978: p. 91) states that although Catholic schools have experienced serious enrollment setbacks, the relative stability in Catholic schools today could be attributed to the deterioration in image of many public schools and the effort of Catholic leaders to adapt to changing conditions. Some of the programs Catholic schools have adopted are collaborative sharing of programs and services with public schools, as well as with other Catholic schools (Olsen, 1975). Changing student bodies in inner city Catholic schools have also inspired changes in methods and materials for minority groups. Another change has been the effort by Catholic school leaders to

> phase out marginal inefficient schools.... have instituted more efficient management systems (e.g., striking improvements in fiscal accounting in many schools), have marshalled the interest and assistance of capable Catholic laymen as never before, and have worked hard to convince potential patrons that, while some of the old characteristics of Catholic education have faded, these institutions have unique advantages. (Erickson, 1978: p. 95)

Lutheran schools, with the exception of the Missouri Synod, have also increased their enrollments. Reasons given for the increases in enrollment among the schools of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod are the growth of the Synod itself, the policy of avoiding tuition charges at least to church members, a firm conservative doctrine, and use of underpaid teachers and administrators. (Erickson, 1978: p. 99) The primary reason for expansion of the schools of the American Lutheran Church by their leaders is the growing dissatisfaction with the academic and moral characteristics of public schools. This dissatisfaction with public schools is also given

as the primary reason for the expansion and growth of Evangelical schools, Episcopal Schools, Seventh Day Adventist Schools, and Jewish Day Schools, all of which are experiencing increased enrollments. Reasons for their growth have been attributed to the emphasis on parental responsibilities in education and self-identification. (Erickson, 1978: pp. 95-125) There are religious groups which have not increased their enrollments, such as the National Union of Christian Schools. However, the general trend in private religious school enrollments has been an increase.

Nonreligious Private Schools

The nonreligious private schools commonly known as "independent schools" are non-sectarian schools that are supported by nonpublic funds. These schools are usually small and quite diverse in their mission. They include college preparatory schools, military schools, boarding schools, schools for the handicapped, and schools for specific racial groups. It is perhaps easier to examine these schools in three groups: boarding schools, day schools, and special schools. The majority of the boarding and day schools are highly selective in their entrance requirements, provide rigorous curricula and strong extra-curricula programs, and send many of their graduates to reputable liberal arts programs. (Erickson, 1978: p. 110; Baird, 1977; Esty, 1974) Most of these schools belong to associations, one of them being the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS). During the past several years, some of these schools have shifted from single-sex to coeducational schools, from boarding to day schools, and from military to non-military schools. The number of coeducational schools increased from 261 in 1964-65 to 541 in 1974-75. The number

of boarding schools decreased from 217 to 186, but the number of day schools increased from 465 to 588, a gain of 26 percent. (Erickson, 1978)

The NAIS reports that there has been a steady growth in the number of student enrollments averaging 1 to 2 percent over the past ten years. Executives of the NAIS attribute this movement to: 1) modernized marketing techniques to recruit students and raise money; 2) more families being able to pay tuition fees for private schools; and 3) increasing dissatisfaction with public schools. (See Table 4 for Proportion of Total U.S. Nonpublic School Enrollment Accounted for by Major Nonpublic School Groups, 1975-76.) Whatever the reasons, private school enrollments are growing particularly among blacks. (See Table 5 and Figure 1)

Baird (1977) conducted a study of two independent schools, including 35 boarding schools and seven day schools. He found these schools were 1) old, with strong histories and traditions; 2) small, with enrollments from 300 to 900 students; and 3) expensive, with the majority of students coming from well-to-do families, although many had scholarship and loan programs for bright but poor students. The curricula offerings included a variety of standard academic courses and were conducted in classes with small overall student teacher ratios. Baird (1977) purports that these schools have a strong interpersonal climate and the students are very active in school activities. In addition to these private independent elite schools, there are university-based schools. These schools maintain close relations with the university. Examples of this type of school are the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago and the Lincoln School at Teachers College.

Table 4

PROPORTION OF TOTAL U.S. NONPUBLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENT ACCOUNTED FOR BY MAJOR NONPUBLIC SCHOOL GROUPS, 1975-76

	Enrollment 1975-76	Percentage of Total
Roman Catholic Schools	3,415,000	75.9
Lutheran Schools		
Missouri Synod	165,604	3.7
American Lutheran	16,121	0.4
Wisconsin Synod	31,183	0.7
Seventh Day Adventist Schools	75,722[a]	1.7
Calvinist Schools (National Union of Christian Schools)	48,585	1.1
Evangelican Schools		
National Assoc. of Christian Schools	23,185	0.5
Western Assoc. of Christian Schools	63,131	1.4
National Christian School Educ. Assoc.	38,175	0.8
Assembly of God Christian Day Schools	21,921	0.5
American Assoc. of Christian Schools	94,722	2.1
Jewish Day Schools		
National Society for Hebrew Day Schools (Orthodox)	82,200	1.8
Solomon Schechter Day Schools (Conservative)	7,965	0.2
Reform Jewish	373	0.01
National Association of Independent Schools	277,406	6.2
Episcopal		
Parish Day Schools	5,536	0.1
Nonparish Schools	71,020	1.6
Friends (Quaker) Schools	13,801	0.3
Military Schools	13,600	0.3
Greek Orthodox Schools	5,009	0.1
Mennonite Schools	8,079	0.2
Nonpublic Alternative (Free) Schools	23,498	0.5
TOTAL ENROLLMENTS REPORTED	4,501,836	100.11[b]

[a] 1974-75

[b] Because of rounding in calculation of percentages, they do not total precisely 100.0

Table 5

ENROLLMENT IN PRIVATE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS AS PERCENT OF TOTAL ENROLLMENT BY RACE AND TYPE OF AREA, 1967, 1972, and 1977

Level and Type of Area	White			Black		
	1967	1972	1977	1967	1972	1977
ELEMENTARY						
United States						
Total enrollment	28,415	29,818	26,873	4,618	5,021	4,887
Private enroll. as % of total	15.4	12.6	12.7	3.7	4.7	5.5
Metropolitan-in central cities						
Total enrollment	6,277	7,127	5,686	2,381	2,956	2,675
Private enroll. as % of total	24.3	19.9	22.3	6.1	6.2	7.9
Metropolitan-outside central cities						
Total enrollment	11,323	12,603	11,736	656	782	859
Private enroll. as % of total	16.6	13.0	12.1	1.4	5.4	5.8
Nonmetropolitan						
Total enrollment	10,815	10,089	9,451	1,581	1,284	1,350
Private enroll. as % of total	9.0	7.0	7.6	1.2	1.1	.7
SECONDARY						
United States						
Total enrollment	11,997	12,959	13,152	1,615	3,025	2,327
Private enroll. as % of total	10.2	8.4	8.9	2.8	2.7	2.5
Metropolitan-in central cities						
Total enrollment	2,774	2,939	2,649	832	1,181	1,273
Private enroll. as % of total	18.6	16.3	19.8	4.1	4.1	2.7
Metropolitan-outside central cities						
Total enrollment	4,767	5,689	6,002	280	359	465
Private enroll. as % of total	10.9	8.3	7.7	1.8	1.7	4.7
Nonmetropolitan						
Total enrollment	4,456	4,331	4,502	538	485	589
Private enroll. as % of total	4.3	3.0	4.1	1.1	.0	.3

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, School Enrollment-Social and Economic Characteristics of Students, Series P-20, Nos. 190, 260, 333, and unpublished tabulations.

Another type of private school is one that serves the needs of certain groups. Unlike the elite boarding, day, and university-affiliated schools, these schools were often established because certain parent and community groups thought that the public schools were irrelevant. They tended to be highly innovative and are often referred to as street academies, free schools, and community schools. (Duke, 1978: Kraushaar, 1972)

Segregation academies are another type of independent school that was established primarily as a result of the desegregation of public schools. (Palmer, 1974: p. 7) The majority of these schools were formed in the late sixties and early seventies to preserve the segregation of races. Although many of them were hastily conceived and faced serious financial pressures when federal and state aid were withheld, several of the schools managed to continue. Palmer (1974: p. 30) contends that these schools are rapidly becoming middle class, preparatory schools and have consequently sparked increased interest in the South for federal aid to nonpublic schools. Presently, data are not available that indicate how many students are being served by these schools. Palmer (1974) maintains that these schools serve white, lower and middle class students and that the facilities and finances vary considerably from one academy to the next.

Publicly Supported Small Schools

Rural Schools

Shifts in migration patterns among rural school districts have significantly affected school enrollments. After World War II, the common U.S. population movement was from rural to urban areas. However, in the early 1970's this trend began to be reversed. For example, Beake reported that

during the early seventies, non-metropolitan areas gained 4.2 percent in population compared to only 2.9 percent for metropolitan areas. (Beale, 1975: p. 3) It was not just shifting numbers of people, but the characteristics of the population migrating to rural areas were considerably different from the past. Prior to the 1970's, the population leaving rural areas tended to have more college training than those remaining in the area. (Ross and Green, 1979: pp. 6-7) In the early seventies the characteristics of the population migrating to rural areas tended to be younger, better educated, and of higher socioeconomic status than the native populations. (Zuiches and Brown, 1978: pp. 55-65)

The reasons for the changes in these migration patterns are both economic and social. Manufacturing and industrial companies are establishing new plants in rural areas in the West and South. In addition to these economically motivated moves, retirees, environmentalists, and other groups are migrating to small towns and rural areas to enhance the quality of their lives. (Ross and Green, 1979: p. 12)

Thus, the new migrants in rural communities now tend to have different educational backgrounds, expectations, and values than the residents. As a consequence, their orientations toward education may be in conflict with the established community. In some instances, it has been positive, for the newcomers have taken an active role in improving the programs in the schools. (Ross and Green, 1979) However, rapid growth also tends to create overcrowding in the schools, resulting in situations where existing facilities and services are not adequate for the school population and the resident community is resistant to making changes to alleviate the conditions. (Ross and Green, 1979)

These recent changes in migration patterns have occurred in some communities. Yet there are other rural areas where the historical problems of rural schools have persisted. For example, common problems in many rural areas include: 1) reducing student nonenrollment and absenteeism, 2) recruiting highly competent teachers and administrators, 3) providing special education and other specialized services, 4) securing needed capital and operating funds, and 5) compensating for the inherent isolation and population sparsity of rural areas. (Sher, 1979: pp. 3-4)

The problem of nonenrollments and absenteeism is particularly prevalent among farm workers (Edelman, 1974: p. 37). Edelman (1974) reports that at least 5.3 percent of all rural school-aged children are not enrolled in any school. This nonenrollment rate is nearly twice that of urban areas and even higher than that for children with parents who are unemployed (Edelman, 1974).

In addition to nonenrollment problems, researchers have found that rural school children consistently scored lower on achievement tests than did students in urban areas (Grant and Und, 1974; Tamblyn, 1973; Coleman et al, 1966). The National Assessment of Educational Progress indicates that rural students (children living in non-metropolitan farming communities with a population under 8,000) scored significantly lower than average students in practically every subject area (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1974). The problem of low test score performance tends to be a rural phenomenon as the existing research on school size indicates that there seems to be no relationship between a student's achievement and the size of the school in which that student is enrolled (Burkhead, Fox, Holland, 1967).

Rural schools have had problems in obtaining and keeping high quality staff (North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, 1974: p. 20). The Oregon State Board of Education (1969) reported that rural teachers tend not to have advanced degrees, are often poorly trained in curricular and guidance principles, and are unfamiliar with the unique problems of rural schools. Similar situations were found at the national level (Estes, 1967). Edington and Musselman (1969) also reported that rural teachers are often placed in situations where they are teaching in areas for which they were unprepared. These problems are not unrecognized by the teachers themselves. Muse (1979) found that teachers in rural western high schools felt that their preservice education did not adequately prepare them for the curricula demands and poor facilities encountered in rural schools.

There are specific problems facing rural schools that other types of small schools do not encounter. Rural schools must contend with the problems of isolation. This implies more than simply overcoming difficulties caused by geography or distance. Rural schools tend to be isolated from the educational, governmental, and economic support systems found in metropolitan areas; and they do not have the benefits and assistance of universities, mental health centers, teacher centers, and cultural institutions (Sher, 1977: p. 7-8).

Even though rural schools do have these problems, many of the teachers, administrators, students, parents, and community members point to "intangible qualities" such as the spirit of cooperation and slower paced environment that make rural schools unique and worthy of continued support. For instance, Tom Gjelten, a teacher in North Haven Island, Maine, contends

the isolation of school makes the students keenly aware of their own singularity and individuality. The school belongs to the community and provides an atmosphere for moral training consistent with the parents' values. (Gjelten, 1978)

Indian Schools

Among the rural schools are schools contracted to Indian groups for their own operation and administration, boarding and day schools for Indians administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and mission schools (Szasz 1977). These schools are usually not included in the literature on rural education, yet they suffer from the same types of problems frequently encountered in rural schools.

For example, the literature on Indian schools including those schools targeted as experimental sites reveal that there is a high teacher turnover rate, with teachers staying only one or two years. The Bureau of Indian Affairs estimated that there was a teacher turnover rate of 25 percent annually, with 40 percent leaving in the first year of teaching. Some of the reasons for a high teacher turnover have been attributed to the rural isolation of many Indian schools. Teachers find it difficult to adjust to the lack of communication with the outside world and grow to resent the personal limitations of living in a small community. (Maclean, 1973; Bayne and Bayne, 1969; Erickson and Schwartz, 1970)

In addition to problems of high teacher turnover and isolation, Indian schools face the problem of cultural dissonance, community involvement and self-determination. Several experimental schools supported by federal funds from the Office of Economic Opportunity and the Bureau of Indian Affairs were established to ameliorate some of these problems.

The results have not been overwhelmingly encouraging. The following examples describe several incidences of Indian schools managed and operated by the Indian community. They are particularly noteworthy because of the differences in results.

The Rough Rock Demonstration School is perhaps the most publicized of the experiments in Indian education. In 1966, a nonprofit corporation of Navajo Indians received funds from the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Office of Education to operate a new boarding school. The project was to be under the control of the Navajos. The intention of the program was to establish a school that would be responsive to the community and have a curriculum that was relevant to the students. Administration of the school was accomplished by an unpaid school board elected by the community. After two years of operation, the Office of Economic Opportunity undertook an independent evaluation of the school. (Maclean, 1973: pp. 40-45) The evaluation of the program was quite critical and contended that the school failed to produce academic skills or a climate inducive to learning that was superior to other experimental schools. (Erickson and Schwartz, 1970: pp. 31-34)

The Talalah Community School has been mentioned as one of the most successful Indian schools. Located on the Quinault Reservation in Washington and serving 138 Indian children from preschool to grade six, this school maintains close relations with the community. (Patterson, 1967; Connelly and Barnhardt, 1970) The curriculum of the school was designed to deal with literacy problems and employed people from the community to work in the schools on these problems.

Dependent Schools

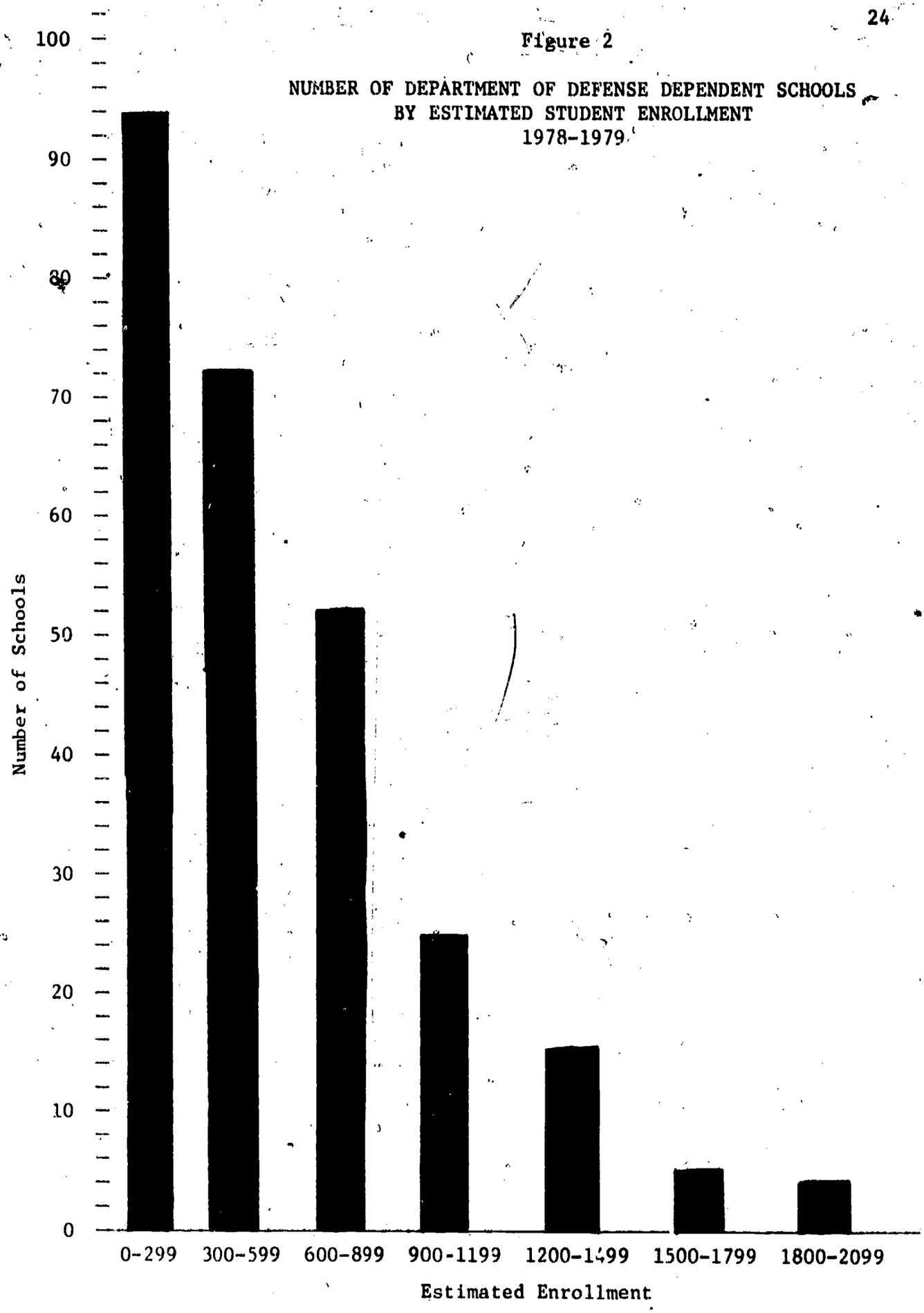
The Department of Defense Dependents Schools (DODDS) system is comprised of 261 schools at 160 different locations and operated by approximately 9,300 educators, other professionals, and support personnel. About 136,000 dependents receive a kindergarten through twelfth grade education and an additional 8,600 students are enrolled in 300 private schools where school facilities are not available. Figure 2 shows the number of Department of Defense Dependents Schools by estimated student enrollments. Approximately 36 percent of the schools would be classified as small schools with student enrollments under 299.

Very little information exists on the effects of DODD schools on the academic achievement of students attending these schools. In addition, there are no systematic evaluations of the benefits of these types of schools. The Department states that the "dependents" education system offers unique advantages which are not available in any stateside private or public school. Host country locations open whole vistas of curriculum development and extracurriculum activities that focus on intercultural education and experiences not available to stateside students." (Department of Defense Office of Dependents Schools, Information Sheet, 1979: p. 5) This may in fact be true, but without any systematic evaluations these remain matters of conjecture.

On November 1, 1978, Congress enacted the Defense Dependents' Education Act of 1978, Public Law 95-561, which required the Secretary of Defense to establish and operate a Defense Dependents' Education System. The passage of the New Department of Education Bill has now moved the

Figure 2

NUMBER OF DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE DEPENDENT SCHOOLS BY ESTIMATED STUDENT ENROLLMENT 1978-1979



SOURCE: Department of Defense Office of Dependents Schools, untabulated data (December 18, 1978).

dependent schools to the Department of Education. (Report to the Congress on the Organization of the Dependents' Education System, 1979; Department of Defense, Office of Dependents Schools, April 1979; Cardinale, 1965) It is expected that the administration and organization of the Department of Defense Dependents Schools (DODDS) will again be revised in the Department of Education. Perhaps, through this reorganization effort, more information on the DODD schools will become available.

Alternative Schools

During the last decade, the American public has become accustomed to terms which describe unconventional types of schools, such as free schools, storefront schools, schools-without-walls, magnet schools, and so on. These schools are conceived of as alternatives to schools operating within the public system. Among the group of alternative schools are publicly supported schools that tend to: 1) provide pedagogical services for students who are not being adequately served in the public schools (examples are special schools for the blind, correctional facilities, and 2) cater in a nonsectarian basis to middle class students of average or above average abilities (examples are Exploratory Learning Centers, The Street Academy, Off-Campus High School). The following information is specifically directed to contemporary alternative schools supported by public funds.

The alternative school movement in the United States reached its peak in the early 1970's. The impetus for this movement grew out of dissatisfaction with traditional forms of schooling. One of the intentions of its creators was to establish schools that were committed to some

vision of humane education. (Graubard, 1972) As more and more private schools were established, people within the public school system began to press for new programs. (Moore, 1978: p. 437)

> From Philadelphia's Parkway Program to John Adams High School in Portland, Oregon, reformers experimented with innovations in style, substance, and structure. Running the gamut from open classrooms in elementary schools to autonomous alternatives at the secondary level, these new programs promised a revolution in American schooling. (Moore, 1978: p. 437)

Most reformers would agree that the alternative movement did not produce the major transformations that were expected. Reasons for the failure of these schools to proliferate and transform the public schools are really matters of speculation. (Rosenfeld, 1978; Moore; Deal, 1975) What is perhaps more interesting is that some publicly financed alternative schools have survived and are continually being supported, though in a different form than originally conceived. (Duke, 1978)

In a recent study by Duke and Muzio (1978), nineteen public alternative schools, established in the last ten years were systematically evaluated. (The only private school in the analysis was Harlem Preparatory.) Results pertaining to size indicated that "one characteristic shared by all alternative and a few conventional schools is their small size. If alternatives as a group are ever found to produce similar effects on students, this factor may be more influential than others." (Duke and Muzio, 1978: p. 466) Other data examined in the study were student characteristics (such as socio-economic factors, academic achievement, affective achievement, work habits and responsibility and social behavior). Duke (1978) found that one of the unique characteristics of many contemporary alternative schools is that they attract academically competent, white, middle

class students. These results were neither confirmed nor rejected in the study of the nineteen schools. Results relating to academic and affective achievement were also not conclusive since 1) different tests were used to assess competence, 2) tests were administered under different conditions and 3) test results were analyzed differently among the schools that used the same form of test.

Assuming that Duke's (1978) findings are accurate, why have alternative schools continued to be supported? Duke (1978) suggests that alternative schools are supported because: 1) they are created and often operate at smaller costs than conventional public schools; 2) they now serve individuals who did not originally support them and are increasingly being used as a mechanism to return to the basics; 3) they are used to forestall busing or advance special interests; and 4) they are viewed as measures to reverse declining academic achievement and diminished interest in schools. (A more complete analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of alternative schools is discussed in Chapter II.)

Summary

The enrollment size of a school has been the major criterion for identifying small schools. There are several problems with using enrollments to characterize schools. This is because attrition and migration makes it difficult to compare enrollment sizes across and within school districts. Even though there are these problems, small schools tend to be identified as those schools enrolling under 300 students at the elementary or secondary level.

Small schools have traditionally been associated with rural schools. However, it is apparent that there are small schools in a variety of places that serve quite diverse populations. One way to categorize small schools would be to identify how the schools are funded. Privately supported small schools include religious and nonreligious schools, boarding schools, and academies. Publicly supported small schools tend to include rural schools, Indian schools, dependent schools, special schools for physically and mentally handicapped, and alternative schools.

Enrollments in each of these types of schools have been fluctuating. It does appear, however, that small schools, even those supported through private funds are thriving. What has not been discussed so far is the quality of education being offered in these small schools. Although it is difficult to generalize, given the diversity of small schools, Chapter II identifies some of the strengths and weaknesses commonly associated with privately and publicly supported small schools.

Chapter II

IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEMS AND STRENGTHS OF SMALL SCHOOLS

Introduction

In 1959, James Conant's study on high schools was published and policymakers quickly began to adopt the twenty-one recommendations to improve the schools. One of the most significant assertions made in the report was that small high schools with fewer than one hundred students in the graduating class could not offer a comprehensive education program. Conant (1959) maintained that "the number of small high schools must be drastically reduced through district reorganization. Aside from this important change, I believe no radical alteration in the basic pattern of American education is necessary in order to improve our public high schools." (Conant, 1959: p. 40) Following Conant's recommendation, educational leaders and policymakers embarked on a massive plan to consolidate the public schools. Consolidation was viewed as the mechanism for improving the quality of educational programs and increasing efficiency. Efforts at consolidation were quite successful and while the population of American elementary and secondary students doubled, the number of small districts was reduced by half. (Sher, 1977: pp. 43-44)

Twenty years after Conant's plea for consolidation, policymakers and educational leaders are re-evaluating "if bigger is really better." Researchers and policymakers are now seriously questioning whether consolidation has improved the quality of education and reduced costs. (Wynne, 1978)

This chapter examines some of the economic issues and quality of education issues related to small schools.

Economics and Small Schools

One of the major criticisms of small schools is that they are not efficient. Concerns over efficiency have focused on the inability of small schools to make quantity purchases, to distribute administrative costs, and to provide specialized programs. These issues provided the impetus for consolidating school districts. Now, evidence seems to show that there are hidden costs associated with large scale schools. Concerns pertaining to optimal size have now concentrated on the increases in costs and losses of quality that occur as the result of increasing the scale of an operation. Criticisms toward large schools have now centered on their inabilities to 1) provide opportunities for students to participate in leadership roles in academic and extracurricular activities; 2) form effective communication networks among students, teachers, administrators and the community, and 3) experiment with new instructional techniques.

These newer concerns over economic issues pertaining to size have intensified the discussions over the benefits and weaknesses of small and large schools. The issues, however, are not clear or overwhelmingly conclusive. Educational policymakers at this time cannot be certain of what trade-offs they may be making when opting for a small or large school.

Costs of Small Schools

Small schools tend to require a relatively high per pupil expenditure for several reasons. First, there are higher administrative costs in smaller schools. Thomas (1974: p. 2) states that the administrative

costs per pupil in school districts of up to 600 pupils are approximately twice that of districts with more than 25,000 pupils. In addition to high administrative costs, Thomas suggests there are also higher teacher costs. Smaller schools have lower teacher-student ratios than in large schools where, because of the higher teacher-student ratios, the district can afford to hire a variety of specialists. In smaller schools, they are forced to hire fewer teachers for special services. Thus, for a rural pupil, a dollar spent on his or her education may purchase less in educational services than a dollar spent on the education of a child in a more densely populated area. (Thomas, 1974: p. 3)

Thomas (1974) also concludes that rural areas pay higher per pupil costs for transportation. This is because the distances to schools are very far and the buses that transport the students operate below capacity. Further, the districts tend to use smaller buses which result in higher per pupil costs for equipment and drivers' salaries.

Finally, the per pupil expenditures are on the average lower in rural areas. Tamblyn (1973: p. 25) estimated that on the average, expenditures for education in rural schools several years ago was about three-fourths of that in urban areas. This is due to inadequate resources to support education primarily as a result of low property tax rates.

Contrary to Thomas and Tamblyn, Sher (1977) maintains that making things bigger does not necessarily reduce the costs. The problem, Sher believes, is that economists fail to acknowledge new costs attributed to increased size of operations. For example,

> the bulk of the relevant research ignores the additional capital expenditures, salaries, and

> operating costs associated with the greatly increased transportation required by consolidation. Children who formerly walked to school now must be bused. Children who used to ride for four or five miles per day now must frequently ride twenty or more miles to reach the "centrally located" school. All this means more buses, more drivers, higher fuel costs, and faster depreciation than was the case prior to consolidation. (Sher, 1977: p. 47)

Sher (1977: p. 48) further purports, "it is not that economies of scale are nonexistent in rural education, but rather that they must be considered in conjunction with existing diseconomies." In the instance of small rural schools, Sher (1979) explains that it is local circumstances that are the key determinants of the economic merits of consolidation. For example, factors such as student density, local valuation levels, salary schedules, marginal costs and cost comparisons for renovation versus new construction are key factors in determining whether consolidation can be economically justified. Consolidation for communities where there is a disregard for local circumstances can be inappropriate or simply unnecessary. (Sher, 1977: p. 49) Moreover, "there is no compelling evidence that proves the consolidation of rural schools and school districts produced significant net economic advantages. (Sher, 1977: p. 57)

The cost issues discussed by Thomas, Tamblyn and Sher are concerned with small rural schools. Publicly supported small schools in urban and suburban areas would be faced with a different set of operating expenses. Presently, there are very few studies that have examined cost comparisons among publicly and privately supported types of small schools. One study that examined both public and private was done by Chambers (1972).

Chambers (1972) compared public and private school size in three locations within the San Francisco Bay area. The three areas where chosen

in order to compare the size of schools without having to contend with the influences of racial and socioeconomic factors. The majority of the private schools were Roman Catholic; the balance included independent private schools and religious schools. Results indicated that private schools tend to operate consistently at smaller sizes than do public schools offering a similar range of grade levels.

In comparing the per pupil expenditures between Roman Catholic schools and public schools, Chambers (1972; p. 32) found that Catholic schools provide a quality of educational services similar to that of the public school but at a relatively smaller size and a relatively lower expenditure per student. Chambers states that Catholic schools are more efficient, for assuming that the quality of educational outcomes are similar in public and private schools, Catholic schools tend to spend less per student than public schools.

Quality of Education

In addition to consolidation for efficiency purposes, it is often argued that consolidation improves the quality of education. Assume that educational quality can be measured by two types of outcomes, cognitive skills and affective characteristics. Very little empirical research has been conducted on the relationship between school size and student achievement. However, the following studies seem to indicate that smaller school size is related to student achievement.

School Size and Student Achievement

Kiesling (1970) examined the effects of high school size on students' achievement tests, holding a measure of I.Q., school inputs and socioeconomic

status of students constant. He found a negative relationship between school quality and school size for schools ranging in size from 200 to 4,000 students. When the data were grouped by regions, the size-performance relationship was negative but statistically insignificant. In contrast when the data were aggregated, the relationship was significant statistically. Kiesling summarized his conclusions.

> There is little evidence in the study that larger high schools are more efficient high schools, while there is considerable evidence that larger high schools are less efficient. In an age of school consolidation, this should serve as at least a word of caution. (Kiesling, 1968: p. 77)

Burkhead, Fox and Holland (1967) also found no statistically significant relationship between school outputs and school size after holding a number of other inputs constant. This was for schools from 500 to 2,500 students.

Coleman (et al., 1966) found school size not to be significantly correlated with achievement. He also found that the size of the 12th grade is negatively correlated with verbal achievement and that each additional 200 students are associated with a decline of one-fifth grade level in achievement. Summers and Wolfe (1977) indicate that higher achievement results correlated with smaller schools at both the elementary and senior high school levels.

This literature compares student achievement in large and small public schools. It would be interesting to examine the relationship between students' achievement and school size among other types of small schools.

School Size and Affective Student Outcomes

Small school proponents tend to use personal accounts and descriptive studies to indicate the affective benefits students receive when attending a small school. These journalistic stories are very impressionable; however, from a research perspective, they are not considered as strong indicators that small schools have a greater sense of community, provide opportunities for increased interactions among students and teachers, increase participation in school activities, effect change with greater ease, and present a student with a greater opportunity to discover his or her identity (North Central Association Committee on Small Schools, 1974: pp. 6-7). There is one study that is an exception to the journalistic format. Barker and Gump (1964) examined the relationship between high school size and student behavior.

Barker and Gump (1964) examined schools that ranged in size from 35 to 2,287 students. One of the areas of concentration in their study was the relation between school size and the scope of academic programs. They found that although the largest school had 65 times as many students as the smallest school, it had only 2.3 times as many kinds of academic activities. In respect to participation and satisfactions derived from these activities, they observed that students attending small schools participate and hold responsible and important positions within a wider variety of activities than do students attending large schools.

> The educational process is a subtle and delicate one about which we know little, but it surely thrives on participation, enthusiasm, and responsibility. Our findings and our theory posit a negative relationship between school size and individual student participation.

> What seems to happen is that as schools get larger and settings inevitably become more heavily populated more of the students are less needed; they become superfluous, redundant. (Barker and Gump, 1964: p. 202)

There also appear to be differences in the satisfaction derived from these activities depending upon which school a student attends.

> . . . Juniors from the small schools reported more satisfactions relating to the development of competence, to being challenged, to engaging in important actions, to being involved in group activities, and to achieving moral and cultural values: while large school Juniors reported more satisfactions dealing with vicarious enjoyment, with large entity affiliation, with learning about their school's persons and affairs, and with gaining 'points' via participation. (Barker and Gump, 1964: p. 197)

Barker and Gump further report that differences in size are more harmful to marginal students (defined as one who is presumably less suited for academic and school life--one who has a tendency to drop out).

> In the small school, marginal characteristics made no difference; marginal students experienced almost as many forces toward participation as the nonmarginal students. In the large school, however, the marginal students experience relatively very few attractions and pressures toward participation. (Barker and Gump, 1964: p. 133)

Pertaining to the scope of the academic programs, Barker and Gump found that smaller schools in comparison to the larger schools offered fewer courses in specialized mathematics, social and behavioral sciences, foreign languages and business. However, examining the content of the courses, it was discovered that some of the material covered in the specialized courses in the large schools was covered in the regular courses in small schools.

From Barker and Gump's analysis one could conclude that small schools have certain advantages over large schools particularly when examining

participation and satisfaction. Chambers (1972: pp. 12-13) has suggested that participation and satisfaction is more prevalent in small schools because, as the school size increases, there may be few opportunities for interaction and communication among the children, the teachers, and between teachers and administrators. Thus coordination of activities is more difficult in a larger setting. To alleviate some of the problems of coordination, administrators may respond by imposing rules and regulations which may in fact stifle interaction and communication. Furthermore, as the school size increases, each student receives less individual attention. The consequences of this are that a student may experience fewer satisfactions and thus have a lower sense of self-efficacy. These affective characteristics may then affect a student's achievement scores. It seems reasonable to conclude that a student's affective attitudes will affect their ability to acquire cognitive skills.

Summary

It is very difficult to determine what the strengths and problems of small schools are for two reasons. The existing studies have tended to: 1) rely on subjective data and often ignore the student outcomes achieved by attending a small school and 2) focus on rural schools when in fact there are a variety of small schools. It may be that the problems encountered in small rural schools can be found in Indian schools or in small schools in foreign countries. Then again, it may be that there are quite diverse problems among these schools. Clearly, private elite day schools will not have the same financial concerns many rural schools have, and thus, it may be easier for them to implement new programs, facilities, and so on.

Rural small schools are often criticized for not having adequate career counseling and guidance services. As a result, it is interesting that in the past five years, the majority of programs for rural small schools have been directed toward improving career counseling. Considering the changing migration patterns in rural areas and the client groups these efforts are directed to serve, it may be prudent to reexamine federal expenditures in this area.

Before policymakers begin to embark on reorganizing the schools into smaller entities, it seems there are several questions which remain unanswered. First, the positive affective characteristics occurring in small schools described by Barker and Gump were found in rural farming areas. Would these same positive characteristics be present in other rural areas, small urban schools, Indian schools, private religious schools? Second, there is little information on outcomes. What are the results of having attended a small school, not only in light of test scores but in personal life success? The need for evaluations of programs, including outcomes, particularly alternative small urban schools, is warranted.

In view of the arguments over costs and efficiency, it would seem that there should be several studies which attempt to assess efficiency. Perhpas these should be on an individual district and school level. Moreover, it would appear that more attention should be given to the way in which Catholic schools are able to operate at optimum levels.

Americans have rediscovered the small school and in that discovery have also found that there are many different types of small schools. These schools differ in their purpose, organizational structure and the

client groups in which they serve. Consequently, the problems each type of school encounters are quite different. Before policymakers revitalize American education by yet another retransformation, there needs to be a clearer distinction on how to identify small schools and their respective strengths and weaknesses.

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