



Vermont Legislative Resea

*school district consolidation is a popular
Education Commissioner, Richard Dite, of
of Vermont. The proposal included
eliminating the supervisory unions and
board to oversee these districts. In the
plan would involve closing small schools,
small schools. Education Commissioner
Mne's G. Bloddi.*

*The most important issues surround
and its impact on the quality of education. A
provides fairly uniform if slightly complex
suggests that district consolidation can
such a way that has negative effects on
positive correlation between school
researchers agree that large schools lead
most researchers argue for a number of
district.*

*It is important to distinguish between
consolidation. Administrative consolidation
schools, simply streamlining the amount
district. Rational consolidation amounts to
one. School district consolidation inheres
but not always, accompanied by educational
consolidation of schools, unless so on
school district consolidation is streamlin
education quality. This report will go through so
on the topic of school district consoli
policy I will also look at what different*

Reasons for Consolidation of School Districts

Economies of Scale

An argument in favor of district consolidation is that a wide range of numbers of students can be served by roughly the same amount of administrators (Duncombe and Yinger, 2005). This argument holds especially true for central administration, as an effective central administration would only have to increase its staff incrementally as the number of students enrolled increases. Central administration is a very costly aspect of a school budget, as the people who are acceptably qualified to run schools and districts will often not accept low pay rates. Thus limiting the number of central administrators is an important issue for districts trying to save money. In practice, however, school consolidation does not necessarily lead to savings in this area (see discussion below).

A similar argument is one based on the assembly line model (Duncombe and Yinger, 2005). Students will be better served if they are in a school that is run like a large machine, with faculty and administrators each performing specialized tasks. A related issue is that of class choice. Larger school districts will be able to offer more specialized classes (AP classes, Special Education, etc.) at a lower cost. If students from one school want to take certain classes, they can just be shipped over to the school that offers them.

Transportation

Many in favor of school district consolidation argue that district consolidation can help rural schools save money on transportation. The argument goes that district consolidation will allow the new, larger districts to better coordinate transportation and buses. A prominent method of accomplishing this is to stagger school start times so that the same buses can be used for multiple schools. Consolidating schools themselves will also theoretically save money for districts as that will create a central point around which to coordinate transportation. One study found that in most cases of school consolidation (not district consolidation) transportation costs decreased in the first year after consolidation, and in the years after consolidation increased at rates similar to those prior to consolidation, which means a net increase in actual savings (Gritter, Silvernail, and Sloan, 2007).

Supplies

Perhaps the most solid fiscal argument in favor of school district consolidation is that schools would be able to take advantage of economies of scale by buying food and school supplies in bulk (Duncombe and Yinger, 2005). While this is a very strong point, it is difficult to see why school districts couldn't achieve this same effect simply by cooperating on this one issue.

Reasons for Limiting Size of School Districts

Transportation

For rural school districts, the cost benefits of consolidation can often only be gained by consolidating schools as well as districts (Duncombe and Yinger, 2006). Larger schools provide a hub from which districts can coordinate bus services, but this forces one or more groups of students to use longer, more costly forms of daily transportation. Longer commutes can also potentially reduce student attendance and performance. A 1973 study found that for every hour spent on a bus, elementary students lost 2.6 achievement points (Lu and Tweeten, 1973). While there is no recent data that conclusively demonstrates reduced performance as a result of longer bus rides, Howley and Howley (2001) describe the findings of a recent study (Fox, 1996) as follows:

Fox found that long rides reduced the number and variety of household activities and reduced students' sleep time, recreational time, academic attentiveness, and extracurricular participation. Moreover, Fox found that rural farm families were e, recr

Another fear regarding district consolidation is about loss of identity. The fear is that school consolidation will lead to a withering away of community and community identity (Rink and Ward, 1992). Rural schools are widely seen as pillars of rural communities, and the fear of loss of control corresponds closely with a fear of loss of community identity.

Administrative Costs

In general, district consolidation has also been shown to increase administrative costs per-pupil while decreasing the amount spent on supplies and teachers (Duncombe and Yinger, 2005). It seems that one of the main risks of district consolidation is indeed the growth of costly and sprawling administrations. Duncombe and Yinger (2005) argue that while this is a serious risk,

Policies in Other States

New York

A report conducted by Duncombe and Yinger (2005) at the Center for Policy Research, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University, surveyed rural schools from 1985 to 1997 in New York to discover the effectiveness of school consolidation. The report found that consolidating districts was cost effective for relatively small consolidations; however, as numbers increase in a given district, both cost effectiveness and educational effectiveness drops off significantly.

To demonstrate this, the report sought to examine costs and performance both before and after consolidation. Costs were measured by the total operating budget of the school districts (combined or otherwise), while performance

Maine

Governor Baldacci has proposed a plan to significantly reorganize the administration Maine school districts. His plan would consolidate 152 school administrative districts into 26 “mega-districts”.

The effort is aimed at reducing statewide school administrative costs from an average of \$396 per pupil to the national average of \$186 per pupil. Since Maine has a ratio of 1 administrator per 393 students, compared to the national ratio of 1 administrator per 816 students, consolidation in Maine would eliminate 1,255 positions, including more than 100 superintendents, by 2008 (Bowley, 2007).

This plan has received a considerable amount of negative feedback. "Hundreds of people—many employed by state school systems or serving on school boards—came to Augusta Monday to denounce Gov. John Baldacci's plan to reduce the number of districts in the state from 290 to 26, with some saying his hidden agenda is to close small schools" (Wallack 2007).

The governor claims that this program will save \$250 million over a three year period, starting in 2009. He also claims that no schools will be closed as a result of the implementation of the program. Many doubts have been expressed about this latter claim, because the closing of schools would be in the hands of more distant regional school boards, the members of which would have less of a personal interest in keeping local schools open. "The biggest drawback of the governor's proposal, according to [State Senator] Nutting, is that it will force small, rural communities with low property values in with urban communities with high property values, which could spell disaster for rural Maine" (Bowley, 2007).

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