

School Consolidation Research – Future of Public Schools in Michigan

In this report, Hanover Research investigates the topic of school and district consolidation to support future consolidation efforts. This report begins with a review of literature regarding the outcomes associated with consolidation. We follow with general guidance on how to deal with consolidating two districts, including state incentives and common issues that have been experienced. Finally, we provide a brief review of potential alternatives to consolidation. Case studies of successful mergers and collaboration plans that have been carried out in public school districts in recent years are also included.

Introduction

In this report, Hanover Research investigates the topic of school and district consolidation to support future consolidation efforts. To begin, we provide a review of available literature on the main benefits and consequences of district and school consolidation. Much of the literature emphasizes the pitfalls of larger enrollments, so this information can be used to devise strategies designed to help avoid negative outcomes.

In the second section, we describe general guidance on how to deal with the consolidation of two districts. In doing so, we review strategies and incentives used in other states to encourage district consolidation, as well as common issues that must be considered when developing a consolidation plan. We also provide case studies of district mergers to demonstrate how other districts have handled similar situations.

Finally, section three reviews potential alternatives to consolidation. The majority of available literature points to collaboration and cooperation as viable alternatives to full-scale consolidation, so this section includes several case studies of districts that have chosen other methods of cutting costs and handling declining enrollments.

Key Findings

Overall, we found that the majority of available research and guidance on district consolidation focuses on geographically rural districts with very small enrollments (generally fewer than 1,000 students), which are not particularly applicable to the current situation with Ypsilanti and Willow Run. However, the general consensus in the literature is that consolidation is not a solution in itself, and that care must be taken to reach intended goals while avoiding common pitfalls.

Studies have typically found that mergers and consolidations seldom result in savings to districts or improved economies of scale unless the combined enrollment is still fewer than 3,000 students. Additionally, academic outcomes for students have been found to be more positive when school and district enrollments are kept low. Finally, eliminating schools and merging districts may result in negative outcomes for the surrounding community, particularly in terms of community pride and motivation. Of note, studies have also indicated that smaller districts are more effective at reducing the achievement gap between white and minority students. Therefore, a consolidation plan should include the following components to address potentially negative outcomes:

- ❖ Measures to prevent lower academic performance and negative social behaviors (e.g., dropout rates), especially among minority and low-income students.

- ❖ Analysis of specific services and programs for which consolidation will result in immediate as well as long-term savings to the districts.
- ❖ Deliberate efforts to uphold the original culture of the schools and the district.
- ❖ Transparency regarding consolidation plan with an emphasis on the potential benefits (e.g., enhanced program or curriculum offerings, special services, etc.).

States have used a variety of methods to incentivize consolidation including offering one-time or long-term financial inducements, imposing minimum enrollment requirements, and issuing unfunded mandates that disproportionately impact small districts. In addition to such state-wide policies, a number of states have attempted to facilitate the process through various strategies ranging from exceptions for districts that are not surrounded by any willing partners, to covering transitional costs, to paying for consolidation feasibility studies.

In encouraging districts to consolidate, it is important to address several issues that have been experienced in other states. For example, Massachusetts cited local control, equalizing salary schedules, transition costs, and differences in educational program offerings as being particular obstacles to consolidation within the commonwealth's public school districts.

Findings from the consolidation feasibility studies conducted in Indiana varied but most found that academic offerings for students could be enhanced through shared services, often as an alternative to full-scale consolidation. Several districts were advised to share administrative or program coordinating personnel in order to reduce costs without decreasing services. While a few studies recommended consolidation of administrative functions, none recommended consolidating schools in the near future without further evaluation and analysis.¹

Districts that choose not to engage in full consolidation typically enter some kind of agreement with neighboring districts in order to lower costs or expand program offerings. These agreements may entail joint administration, shared programs and services, and open enrollment policies, among other potential opportunities. It appears that many experts on consolidation agree that small districts do not necessarily need to be consolidated in order to accomplish district goals, as cooperation and collaboration may ultimately result in the same positive outcomes.

¹ Spradlin, T., Carson, F., Hess, S., and Plucker, J. 2010. "Revisiting School District Consolidation Issues." Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, 8:3, 6.
http://www.indiana.edu/~ceep/projects/PDF/PB_V8N3_Summer_2010_EPB.pdf

Section I: Literature Review

In this section, we review available literature on the main benefits and consequences of district and school consolidation. Much of the literature emphasizes the pitfalls of larger enrollments, so this information can be used to devise strategies that will help avoid negative outcomes.

Student Outcomes

The vast majority of research linking consolidation efforts to student outcomes does not examine the impact of consolidation in itself, but rather outcomes that are correlated with the number of students enrolled in schools or districts. First, a 2009 report from the Center for the Study of Education Policy at Illinois State University lists the following studies on the impact of school and district size on student performance:²

- ❖ Student achievement in smaller schools is equal to or better than that of students in large schools. One review of research conducted prior to 1996 revealed that no studies have found large school achievement to be superior to small school achievement.³
- ❖ Student in smaller schools show lower rates of negative social behaviors; additionally, dropout rates are lower and graduation rates higher are in smaller schools.⁴
- ❖ Achievement effects of small schools are especially strong for minority and low-income students, who score higher on standardized tests when they attend schools with lower enrollment.⁵
- ❖ Small schools appear to be equal or superior to large schools in their ability to prepare students for college admission and completion.⁶

In a 2011 report on consolidation from the National Education Policy Center, Howley and colleagues⁷ echo these findings, explaining that “even when consolidation does produce a wider menu of educational experiences for students, evidence suggests that large school and district size negatively affects desirable

² Bullets quoted verbatim from “County School Districts: Research and Policy Consolidations.” 2009. Center for the Study of Education Policy.

<http://centereducationpolicy.illinoisstate.edu/initiatives/countyschooldist/countyschooldistricts.pdf>

³ Ibid., citing Cotton, K. 1996. “School size, school climate, and student performance.” Northwest Regional Education Laboratory. upstate.colgate.edu/pdf/Abt_merger/Cotton_1996_Size_Climate_Performance.pdf

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., citing Rural School and Community Trust. 2006. “Anything but research-based: State initiatives to consolidate schools and districts.” Rural Policy Matters. <http://www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=2034>

⁶ Ibid., citing Cotton. “School size, school climate, and student performance.” Op. cit.

⁷ Howley, C., Johnson, J., and Petrie, J. 2011. “Consolidation of Schools and Districts: What the Research Says and What it Means.” National Education Policy Center, 9. <http://www.bricker.com/documents/resources/local/nepc.pdf>

academic outcomes.”⁸ The authors cite several studies on behavioral outcomes that have found larger schools “to be associated with reduced rates of student participation in co-curricular activities, more dangerous school environments, lower graduation rates, lower achievement levels for impoverished students, and larger achievement gaps related to poverty, race, and gender.”⁹ Finally, the authors emphasize the importance of the finding that “larger district size has been shown to be negatively associated with the achievement of impoverished students.”¹⁰

Also related to outcomes for impoverished students, the Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA) Education Research and Policy Center described a 2002 study that examined scores on seven state-required tests in all consolidated schools in Arkansas.¹¹ This study reached the following conclusions:

- ❖ Small schools in high-poverty communities produced higher student achievement than the larger consolidated buildings
- ❖ Higher achievement in small schools narrowed the gap between students from affluent and poor communities
- ❖ Small schools are more effective against poverty when they were part of small districts
- ❖ Poverty exerts a larger detrimental effect in large schools in large districts

⁸ Ibid., citing Monk, D. and Haller, E. 1993. “Predictors of high school academic course offerings: The role of school size.” *American Educational Research Journal*, 30:1, 3-21.; Johnson, J. 2006. “More doesn’t mean better: Larger high schools and more course offerings do not boost student achievement in Iowa.” The Rural School and Community Trust.; Lee, V., Croninger, R., and Smith, J. 1997. “Course-taking, equity, and mathematics learning: Testing the constrained curriculum hypothesis in U.S. secondary schools.” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 19:2, 99-121; Uerling, D. and Dlugosh, L. 1999. “Selected indicators of a quality high school: program offerings and student participation.” Paper Presented at the 8th Annual Conference on Creating Quality Schools.

⁹ Ibid., citing Cotton, K. 1996. “Affective and social benefits of small-scale schooling.” ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.; Bickel, R. and Howley, C. 2000. “The influence of scale on student performance: A multi-level extension of the Matthew principle.” *Educational Policy Analysis Archives*, 8:22.; Howley, C. and Howley, A. 2004. “School size and the influence of socioeconomic status on student achievement: Confronting the threat of size bias in national data sets.” *Educational Policy Analysis Archives*, 12:52.; Johnson, J. 2007. “School size, social justice, and conflicting state objectives: An investigation of achievement distributions among Kentucky public schools.” *Education Leadership Review*, 8:1, 51-64; Klein, R. and Johnson, J. 2010. “On the use of locale in understanding the mathematics achievement gap.” Proceedings of the 32nd Annual Meeting of the North American Chapter of the International Group for the Psychology of Mathematics Education.; Pittman, R. and Haughwout, P. 1987. “Influence of high school size on dropout rate.” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 9:4, 337-343; Raywid, M. 1999. “Current literature on small schools.” ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.

¹⁰ Ibid., citing Bickel and Howley, 2002. Op. cit.; Friedkin, N. and Necochea, J. 1988. “School system size and performance: A contingency perspective.” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 10:3, 237-249.; Howley, C. 1996. “Compounding disadvantage: The effects of school and district size on student achievement in West Virginia.” *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 12:1, 25-32.

¹¹ Pennsylvania School Boards Association. 2009. “Merger/Consolidation of School Districts: Does it save money and improve student achievement?” PBSA Education Research and Policy Center, 9. <http://www.pbsa.org/issues-advocacy/issues-research/school-mergers/psba-merger-paper.pdf>

- ❖ Smaller schools significantly counteracted poverty's power to lower student achievement¹²

Finally, the PSBA also described a 2005 study, which found that consolidation of school districts may lead to more students dropping out of high school, while the reverse (deconsolidation) has a statistically significant, positive effect on graduation rates. The authors of this 2005 study explained that “the apparent reason for the beneficial effect was **the ability of parents to choose among a greater number of small districts.**”¹³

Costs

Howley and colleagues, in the National Education Policy Center report, explain that recent research on the effects of consolidation generally suggests that new mergers are unlikely to result in greater district efficiency because earlier consolidation pushes at the state level have long since achieved the desired systemic benefits. In fact, the authors argue that “the consolidation strategy seems to have reached the point at which markedly diminished returns should be anticipated.”¹⁴ This finding has been reached in multiple state-level feasibility studies (for example, Louisiana, Indiana, Montana, and North Carolina), all of which concluded that state efforts to consolidate districts no longer meet their intended goals.¹⁵

In Michigan, specifically, a 2007 study by the Center for Educational Freedom at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy analyzed the relationship between district size and per-pupil expenditures in Michigan, in efforts to test the notion that consolidating smaller districts will save taxpayers money. The analysis revealed that the most cost-effective size for a school district in Michigan is approximately 2,900 students, such that districts with more or fewer students tend to spend more per pupil. Thus, the authors asserted that “the potential savings from consolidating excessively small districts is about 12 times smaller than the potential savings from breaking up excessively large ones.” The authors further argued “that neither mergers nor

¹² Ibid., citing Johnson, J., Howley, C., and Howley, A. 2002. “Small Works in Arkansas: How Poverty and the Size of Schools and School Districts Affect Student Achievement in Arkansas.” The Rural School and Community Trust. <http://www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=2068>

¹³ Ibid., citing Green, J. and Winters, M. 2005. “The Effect of Residential School Choice on Public High School Graduation Rates.” Manhattan Institute for Policy Research Education Working Paper #9. http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/ewp_09.htm

¹⁴ Howley et al. Op. cit., 8., citing Sher, J. and Schaller, K. 1986. “Heavy Meddle: A Critique of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction’s Plan to Mandate School District Mergers Throughout the State.” Rural Education and Development. <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED270245.pdf>; Schwinden, T. and Brannon, L. 1993. “School Reorganization in Montana: A Time for Decision?” Montana School Boards Association. <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED444769.pdf>

¹⁵ Ibid., 3.

consolidations are likely to bring about dramatic reductions to the roughly \$17 billion per year spent on Michigan public schools.”¹⁶

Finally, the report from the Center for the Study of Education Policy at Illinois State University referenced the following conclusions reached by studies on the impact of school or district size on economies of scale:¹⁷

- ❖ Capital costs are lowered only when consolidating relatively small districts; capital costs increase when consolidating districts of 1,500 pupils or more¹⁸
- ❖ When student performance is held constant, consolidation will be likely to lower costs of two 300-pupil districts by slightly more than 20 percent; lower costs of two 900-pupil districts by about 8 percent; and have little impact on the costs of two 1500-pupil districts¹⁹
- ❖ Two inefficient districts combined do not necessarily create one efficient district²⁰
- ❖ Expenditures per student rise when district size falls below 750 students²¹
- ❖ The larger the school district, the more resources devoted to secondary and non-essential activities²²
- ❖ While consolidation reduces costs in small districts in the short term, these reductions are replaced in the long term with new expenditures, such as expanded administrative, supervisory and specialized staff²³
- ❖ For high schools, as enrollments increase, costs per student decrease; however, in very large high schools, costs per student rise again due to the need for more supervisory staff
- ❖ Costs for elementary students remain unchanged with increased enrollments²⁴

Community

A third area impacted by district size is the community; Howley and colleagues assert that “the influence of district consolidations on the vitality and well-being of

¹⁶ Coulson, A. 2007. “School District Consolidation, Size, and Spending: An Evaluation.” The Mackinac Center for Public Policy, 1-2. <http://www.mackinac.org/archives/2007/s2007-06.pdf>

¹⁷ “County School Districts: Research and Policy Consolidations.” Op. cit., 4. (Bullets quoted verbatim)

¹⁸ Ibid., citing Duncombe, W. and Yinger, J. 2003. “Does school district consolidation cut costs?” Syracuse University Center for Policy Research.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., citing Louisiana Department of Education. 2003. “Small School Districts and Economies of Scale.” Presented to the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, 15. <http://www.louisianaschools.net/lde/uploads/3475.pdf>

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., citing Bard, J., Gardener, C., and Wieland, R. 2005. “Rural school consolidation report.” National Rural Education Association.

²⁴ Ibid., citing Boex, L. and Martinez-Vasques, J. 1998 “Structure of school districts in Georgia: Economies of scale and determinants of consolidation.” Fiscal Research Program Report #16.

communities may be the most dramatic result, if the one least often discussed by politicians or education leaders.”²⁵ According to the report, district consolidation, and especially school closure, “erodes a community’s social and economic base – its sense of community, identity, and democracy – and the loss permanently diminishes the community itself, sometimes to the verge of abandonment.”²⁶

The Louisiana Department of Education explains in a 2003 report that the impact of consolidation on the community may be difficult to measure but still has a substantial effect on student success.²⁷ According to the report, “consolidating two small schools can result in fewer opportunities, such as fewer jobs for teachers who are members of each community, fewer places on sports teams, fewer positions in the band, and fewer chances for parents to join with neighbors in the local PTA.”²⁸ Additionally, consolidation may result in a “lower level of staff motivation and effort, lower student motivation and effort, and lower parental involvement. These effects are attributed to less of a sense of belonging and loss of control that were associated with smaller schools and districts.”²⁹

A related topic, the report from the Center for the Study of Education Policy at Illinois State University described the following impacts on curriculum and program offerings as identified by studies on the impact of school or district size:³⁰

- ❖ There is no reliable relationship between school size and curriculum quality. However, curriculum variety increases slightly (17 percent) with a doubling of high school enrollment.³¹
- ❖ Students in large schools are more polarized, with a group of active extracurricular participants at one end of the continuum and a large group of students not participating in any extracurricular activities at the other. In small schools, very few students do not participate in any extracurriculars.³²

²⁵ Howley et al. Op. cit., 9.

²⁶ Lyson, T. 2002. “What does a school mean to a community? Assessing the social and economic benefits of schools to rural villages in New York.” *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 17:3, 131-137.

²⁷ Louisiana Department of Education. Op. cit., 15.

²⁸ Ibid., citing Ehrenhalt, A. 2003. “The Consolidation Divide.” *Governing: The Magazine of States and Localities*, 16:6, 6-8.

²⁹ Ibid., 16. Citing Duncombe, W. and Yinger, J. 2000. “Does School District Consolidation Cut Costs?” The Center for Policy Research.

³⁰ “County School Districts: Research and Policy Consolidations.” Op. cit., 5. (Bullets quoted verbatim)

³¹ Ibid., citing Cotton. “School size, school climate, and student performance.” Op. cit.

³² Ibid., citing Cawelti, G. 1993. “Restructuring large high schools to personalize learning for all.” *ERS Spectrum*, 17-21.

Section II: Managing District Consolidation

In this section, we provide general guidance on how to deal with the consolidation of two districts as described in the literature. In doing so, we review strategies and incentives used in other states to encourage district consolidation, as well as common issues that must be considered in developing a consolidation plan. We also provide case studies of district mergers to demonstrate how other districts have handled similar situations.

To effectively incentivize consolidation, it is important to first examine the impact of size on various outcomes. The advantages and disadvantages associated with school and district size as well as independence and consolidation status have been thoroughly described in the literature. The Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations reviewed school consolidation studies from the past few decades and listed the following perceived benefits and liabilities of consolidated districts and independent districts:³³

	<i>Perceived Benefits</i>	<i>Perceived Liabilities</i>
<i>Consolidated School Districts</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More efficient use of public funds through economies of scale Lower per-pupil costs Expanded curriculum Expanded extracurricular activities Higher salaries/benefits for teachers More specialized teachers and staff Better instructional materials and equipment More resources for advanced and special needs students Greater cultural diversity Lower teacher turnover State consolidation funding incentives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher transportation costs Time lost to busing Less parent-teacher interaction Less community support for schools and education bond issues Adverse community economic consequences: lower housing values, more pressure on property tax base Declines in enrollment over time Failure to achieve significant long-term savings from economies of scale Increase power of teacher unions Significant one-time costs: signage, uniforms, stationary, websites Diseconomies if consolidated district is too large
<i>Independent Districts</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community pride and identify More responsive to needs of individual students Slower relationships among students, teachers and staff More family-teacher interaction Less bureaucracy/fewer management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher per-pupil costs Limited curriculum offerings Limited extracurricular offerings Less scheduling flexibility for students and teachers Fewer opportunities for professional development and interactions among

³³ “County School Districts: Research and Policy Consolidations.” Op. cit., 3. Adapted from Young, E. and Green, H. 2005. “School System Consolidation.” Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations Staff Education Brief, 8.
http://www.tn.gov/tacir/PDF_FILES/Education/school%20consolidation.pdf

	problems	teachers
	Less transportation costs and time Local control over policies and curriculum Greater sense of loyalty and belonging, with more positive student attitudes Greater opportunity for students to develop leadership skills Fewer disciplinary problems Higher graduation rates; lower dropout rates	Fewer/lower quality instructional supplies and equipment Lower expectations for student learning Heavier teaching loads and more non- teaching assignments Too few students in grade levels for healthy competition

Specific studies that highlighted the benefits of consolidation have reported the following findings:³⁴

- ❖ Small school districts have been found to be more likely to have a building with a feature in less than adequate condition; in addition, lower budgets and decreased access to quality teachers often means fewer educational resources and fewer specialized courses and services.³⁵
- ❖ Large school districts have a number of advantages over smaller districts, including more total resources, standardized curricula, higher salaries for administrators, larger professional staffs, better pay and improved fringe benefits for teachers, and a greater power base for school boards in matters of educational policy and financial management.³⁶
- ❖ Teachers and administrators in larger districts have used bargaining advantages to extract better terms from school boards, but the geographically restricted competition allows them to capture those gains for themselves rather than passing them on to their “customers” in higher quality education.³⁷
- ❖ A lack of tax base means that rural (small) school districts operate with a disproportionate percentage of their operating budget going to salaries and administration with little left over for innovative programs, expanded course offerings, continuing education, administrative assistance or high tech educational resources. Additionally, competing private schools drain valuable community support and human resources from the rural public school systems.³⁸
- ❖ Small district size has greater adverse effects on students who are in some sense unusual, such as handicapped and gifted students.³⁹

³⁴ Louisiana Department of Education. Op. cit. (Bullets quoted with slight variation)

³⁵ Ibid., citing Schwartzbeck, T. 2003. “Declining Counties, Declining School Enrollments.” American Association of School Administrators. <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED478349.pdf>

³⁶ Ibid., citing Williams, D. 1990. “The Dimensions of Education: Recent Research on School Size.”

³⁷ Ibid., citing Galles, G. and Sexton, R. 1995. “Diseconomies of School District Size.” *Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies*, 20:2, 241-245.

³⁸ Ibid., citing Williams. Op. cit.

³⁹ Ibid.

These findings are not true of all small districts, and each case may be wholly unique. Therefore, it is important to emphasize the specific benefits that may be reached through consolidation while addressing the real challenges faced by independent school districts in devising a consolidation plan. In doing so, it may be possible to effectively incentivize consolidation by tapping into the actual needs and goals of the districts at hand.

Incentives

A number of state-wide initiatives have been effective in encouraging consolidation. In recent years, as several states have promoted wide-scale school and district consolidation in through various combinations of incentives, disincentives, and direct policy interventions intended to make the operation of smaller schools and districts more difficult and make mergers more appealing and cost-effective.⁴⁰ Examples include:⁴¹

- ❖ Offering state funds to build new, consolidated schools that meet minimum size requirements, particularly when school districts have limited fiscal capacity and depend on state dollars for capital construction projects. (e.g., Kentucky, West Virginia, Ohio)⁴²
- ❖ Offering direct financial inducements to consolidating districts, via one-time incentive grants or multi-year commitments, purportedly to cover the costs of consolidating. (e.g., Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, New York)⁴³
- ❖ Facilities construction policies mandating minimum enrollments or disallowing renovations in existing structures, or both (e.g., Alabama, Kentucky, Ohio, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia)⁴⁴
- ❖ Unfunded mandates related to staffing, curriculum offerings, or graduation requirements that result in the need for additional and specialized staffing that smaller districts cannot readily afford (e.g., California, New York, Texas)⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Howley et al. Op. cit., 4. (Bullets quoted with slight variation)

⁴¹ Ibid., citing: Buchanan, B. 2004. "What consolidation could mean for your district." *American School Board Journal*, 191:7, 1-18.; "School district consolidation in other states." 2008. New York State Commission on Local Government Efficiency and Competitiveness. http://www.nyslocalgov.org/pdf/School_District_Consolidation_in_Other_States.pdf; Rural School and Community Trust. 2006. "Anything but research-based: State initiatives to consolidate schools and districts." Rural Policy Matters. <http://www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=2034>

⁴² Ibid., citing: Hughes, B. 2003. "Surviving closings and consolidations." *School Administrator*, 60:7, 16-18.; Richard, A. 2005. "West Virginia Governor cool to school consolidation." *Education Week*, 24:31, 28, 36.

⁴³ Rodine, K. "Idaho school districts consolidations are often discussed, rarely embraced." *Idaho Statesman*, October 3, 2010.; Ryden, K. "School boards learn consolidation brings financial incentives." *The Daily Register*, October 22, 2010. <http://www.dailyregister.com/newsnow/x2030537011/School-boards-learn-consolidation-brings-financial-incentives>; Tonn, J. 2007. "Savings from school consolidation plans uncertain." *Education Week*, 26:29, 10; Yount, L. and Mann, F. "Report: Savings from school district consolidation not as great as thought." *Wichita Eagle*, February 14, 2010. <http://www.kansas.com/2010/02/14/1180733/report-savings-from-school-district.html>

⁴⁴ Ibid., citing: Howley, C. 2002. "Small schools." *School reform proposals: The research evidence*.

In addition to these initiatives, states have employed a number of strategies to facilitate the process for districts:⁴⁶

- ❖ **Maine** enacted a law in 2007 that required all school districts to work together to reorganize into larger, more efficient units containing a minimum of 2,500 students. The law included a few exceptions: of note, small districts surrounded by larger districts with high performance and efficiency or that simply refused to merge were not required to submit a reorganization plan.
- ❖ **New Jersey** legislature enacted a bill that gave county school superintendents more authority over the elimination of non-operating school districts, the creation of K-12 school districts, decisions regarding administrative services provided to school districts, and approval of certain expenditures.
- ❖ **Vermont's** Education Commissioner recommended that all districts with fewer than 1,500 students collaborate with other districts to become part of a larger district. The Commissioner also recommended that the state pay for transitional costs of mergers, that the restructuring allow for school choice at the high school level, and that all new school districts decide how to engage citizens.
- ❖ **Indiana's** Commission on Local Government Reform called for the reorganization of school districts and a minimum enrollment of 2,000. The Commission also recommended that all district purchasing be done through a regional, cooperative entity unless savings through independent purchasing could be documented.

Additionally, the Indiana Department of Education offered one-year grants of up to \$25,000 to school corporations interested in studying the feasibility of merging or consolidating services with another district in order to offset the costs of the study. Eight feasibility studies were conducted between 2007 and 2009; each lasted one year and was carried out by a third-party entity. The studies, which are provided in the “profiles” subsection below and in Section III, focused on initiatives ranging from partial sharing of services to full district consolidation.⁴⁷

Issues to Consider

The circumstances of consolidation efforts that were common in the 20th century are “remarkably different” from those prompting district reorganization and mergers today. In fact, several state-level studies of the effects of consolidation have agreed

⁴⁵ Ibid., citing: “State sued over unfunded mandates.” Association of California School Administrators. <http://www.acsa.org/FunctionalMenuCategories/AboutACSA/Councils/Superintendency/Statesuedoverunfundedmandates.aspx>; Boulat, E. “Are Unfunded Mandates Suffocating Our Public Schools?” *Rivertowns Patch*, July 30, 2010. <http://rivertowns.patch.com/articles/are-unfunded-mandates-suffocating-our-public-schools>; Kappes, H. “Schools seek help on unfunded state mandates.” *The Daily News*, May 30, 2010. <http://galvestondailynews.com/story/157437>

⁴⁶ “School district consolidation in other states.” 2008. New York State Commission on Local Government Efficiency and Competitiveness. http://www.nyslocalgov.org/pdf/School_District_Consolidation_in_Other_States.pdf

⁴⁷ Spradlin et al. Op. cit., 6.

that “consolidations that are most likely to generate efficiencies of scale have long been realized.”⁴⁸ In addition, consolidation can result in different outcomes depending on the socio-demographic characteristics of the community: several researchers have indicated that “low-wealth and minority populations tend to be inordinately and negatively affected by consolidation initiatives.”⁴⁹ Therefore, Howley and colleagues recommend that when consolidation efforts address involve low-wealth or minority populations, it is important to carefully evaluate the situation and ensure that “community participation [is] strongly cultivated.”⁵⁰

Two regional planning studies conducted in Massachusetts revealed several key barriers to consolidation experienced by small school districts. First, **local control** has historically been a major obstacle to regionalizing school districts because “voters want to maintain control over their local schools, and local preferences manifest themselves in a variety of ways, through program, curriculum, and personnel decisions as well as through spending.”⁵¹ According to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Mass ESE), a district’s interest in consolidating may be seriously impacted by any one of these areas, particularly when individual districts may not agree on a specific issue and one of the districts could potentially suffer if a decision is not made in its favor.

Mass ESE further explains that communities are “fearful at the prospect of closing schools, particularly elementary schools, as a perceived consequence of forming new regional districts.” Therefore, in establishing a consolidation plan, it is important to evaluate the alignment between school closings and community goals. Additionally, while the merger itself may result in a cost savings overall, school closings “may be impractical if it means transporting students, particularly younger students, over longer distances for longer periods of time.” It is therefore suggested that districts draft an agreement to address this issue, “for instance, by including a stipulation that at least one elementary school remain in each member town.” A final approach to maintaining local control, contributed by Mass ESE, is “to seek legislation to create more powers for school councils in regional districts or provide more autonomies to individual schools while remaining under the regional district’s authority.”⁵²

⁴⁸ Howley et al. Op. cit., 10. Citing: Coulson. Op. cit.; Louisiana Department of Education. Op. cit.; Schwinden and Brannon. Op. cit.; Spradlin et al. Op. cit.

⁴⁹ Ibid. Citing: Johnson, J. 2006. “District reorganization leads to school closures in Arkansas, especially in high poverty and African-American Communities.” The Rural School and Community Trust. <http://www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=2029>; Jimerson, L. 2005. “The impact of Arkansas Act 60 consolidation on African-American school leadership and the racial composition of school districts.” The Rural School and Community Trust. http://www.ruraledu.org/user_uploads/file/docs/Impact_of_Arkansas.pdf

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Carleton, S., Lynch, C., and O’Donnell, R. 2009. “School district consolidation in Massachusetts: Opportunities and obstacles.” Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Education Research Brief, 11. <http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/reports/1109consolidation.pdf>

⁵² Ibid., 11.

A second barrier to consolidation is the implication of **equalizing salary schedules**. This is of particular importance in Massachusetts, where “state law requires that districts merging into a regional district pay each teacher no less than he or she was making before the merger.” Therefore, the highest salary schedule among the districts being consolidated will likely become the new salary schedule for all districts involved in the merger, and this is especially critical in cases in which one district’s salary schedule is considerably higher than another.⁵³

Various one-time and short-term **transition costs** are described as an additional barrier to consolidation. It may be necessary to establish a new central office and develop “its administrative capacity, including business and operations functions and curriculum development and oversight.” Mass ESE recommends that in some cases, districts would benefit from funding “overlapping personnel for some period to ensure that schools function smoothly throughout the transition.” It is also possible that merging districts may need to buy shares in each other’s previous capital costs, such as newly constructed facilities. Such buy-outs prevent new members in the union “from free-riding on the capital investments that the other member towns have made.”⁵⁴

A final obstacle to consolidation cited by Mass ESE is addressing **educational program differences**. Although regionalization provides the benefit of being able to “align curricula and other programs so that students arrive at middle school and high school with similar levels of experience and expectations, the process of aligning programs, however, may be easier said than done.” An example provided by Mass ESE is that “a district that has invested in bringing special education out-placements back into the district may not want to revisit this issue with potential regional partners that outpace more of their higher-need special education students at significantly greater cost.”⁵⁵

⁵³ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 13.

Profiles

Below, we provide profiles of cases in which full consolidation was found to be an effective choice for expanding educational offerings while reducing costs.

*Monroe Central Community Schools and Union School Corporation (Randolph County, Indiana)*⁵⁶

Combined student enrollment: 1,431⁵⁷

Objective: Identify potential areas for collaboration and shared services, and examine the feasibility of combining the two school corporations into one.

Recommendations: Align their schedules and academic calendars to increase curriculum offerings between schools and, more specifically, create an opportunity for Union students to take Advanced Placement (AP) and Advanced College Project (ACP) courses and for Monroe Central students to take industrial technology courses. Additional, potential cost savings in sharing transportation facilities and maintenance, sharing a curriculum director, creating joint opportunities for professional development, investigating opportunities for libraries to be maintained as public libraries as well as school libraries, and the repair and maintenance of technological equipment.

Long-term planning: The school corporations need to consider consolidating the two corporations and combining their high schools in the next three years.

Outcomes: The two school corporations have increased their shared services by sharing certified specialists, such as a speech language pathologist, that neither corporation could afford individually. Union students are able to attend the summer agriculture education program at Monroe Central, Union students are able to attend courses at Monroe Central (e.g., physics) that are not offered at their home school.

*Randolph Central, Randolph Eastern, Randolph Southern, and Union School Corporations (Randolph County, Indiana)*⁵⁸

Combined student enrollment: 3,166

Objective: Determine how the educational opportunities provided to students could be enhanced amid declining enrollment levels.

⁵⁶ Spradlin et al. Op. cit., 8. (Quoted with slight variation)

⁵⁷ All data provided for 2007-2008 academic year unless otherwise noted

⁵⁸ Ibid., 8. (Quoted with slight variation)

Recommendations: Align school calendars and daily schedules, institute open enrollment policies for all Randolph County School corporations, centralize and expand summer school programming, train staff on common software and management programs, and standardize the curriculum.

Consolidation efforts: Consolidate the four current school corporations into one new school corporation in three to five years. One school board responsible for the operation of all of the schools in the corporation would be created and the four central administration offices should be consolidated into one. The master contracts could be renegotiated as one contract for the entire corporation. This consolidation would also create opportunities to centralize transportation, technology, maintenance, and cafeteria services.

Long-term planning: School corporations will evaluate enrollment levels and academic offerings prior to committing to renovations at any of the high schools, consider the possibility of building a career center for the county, and, in the event of high school consolidation, use the vacated building for other educational purposes such as alternative or career programs. Future goals include working together to establish a career and technical program in Randolph County, investigating the possibility of using current high school facilities to establish specialty schools, and continuing to explore distance learning as a way to increase course offerings.

Outcome: The school corporations adopted textbooks together, built a common school calendar for the county, implemented a shared summer school program, adopted resolutions calling for common high school schedules to more easily allow for the sharing of students and staff, and arranged for joint purchasing/bidding of food for the cafeterias. Randolph Central and Randolph Eastern successfully partnered in applying for an “Enhancing Education through Technology” grant from the Indiana Department of Education. Union and Randolph Southern moved forward with plans for actual consolidation of central office administration, and becoming one new consolidated district.

Rockville, Turkey Run, and SW Parke Community School Corporations (Parke County, Indiana)⁵⁹

Combined student enrollment: 2,434

Objective: Expand student programs and educational opportunities through merging services and administrative positions.

Recommendations: Expand collaborative efforts to provide more program opportunities to students, such as coordinating school schedules and calendars, developing a

⁵⁹ Ibid., 10. (Quoted with slight variation)

common curriculum, and utilizing the same textbooks and software programs. Increase the availability of summer school courses and collaborate to provide more high ability classes through sharing programs, participating in online and distance learning programs, and offering dual credit courses through college campuses.

Consolidation efforts: Consolidate all administrative services and policy-making functions at the corporation level, which would result in the creation of one representative school board, one Parke County Superintendent of Schools, and one master contract and payroll and benefits package. The estimated cost savings of this administrative consolidation of between \$210,000 and \$250,000 would be redirected to upgrading student programs.

Outcomes: The high schools have incorporated joint course offerings into the student scheduling process, and the school corporations share a driver's education teacher. Turkey Run students will attend a speech class offered jointly by Ivy Tech and Rockville, through which they will be able to earn both high school and college credit. The corporations plan to continue having discussions about increasing shared services and resources.

*Chattanooga School System and Hamilton County Schools (Chattanooga, Tennessee)*⁶⁰

Combined student enrollment: 41,832⁶¹

Objective: Deal with rising costs and declining enrollments in the city's schools.

Conflict overview: It was argued that the merger would benefit city taxpayers, whose property taxes supported both districts, and that students throughout the area would benefit from a redesigned system. However, opponents to the merger warned that "the mainly white county school system would not properly educate low-income black students; and school closings, massive teacher reassignments, and massive busing would occur, eventually costing more per student."

Consolidation efforts: After voters approved the merger, the systems were redesigned with the following principles:

- ❖ An un-tracked curriculum
- ❖ Active learning and academic coaching
- ❖ High expectations for student achievement

⁶⁰ "County School Districts: Research and Policy Consolidations." Op. cit., 6-7. Citing Bradley, A. 1996 "Beyond city limits." *Education Week*, 14:41, 32-39.

⁶¹ Data provided for 2009-2010 academic year from: "Search for Public School Districts." National Center for Education Statistics. <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/>

- ❖ Parent/family involvement in decision-making
- ❖ Extensive use of technology

Outcomes: At the middle school sites, students are assigned to interdisciplinary teams with three to five teachers, which “have allowed each school to create a plan for achievement that is unique to their students, faculty and campus.” The high schools offer dual enrollment opportunities, virtual courses, and an alternative campus for credit recovery. Schools at all levels throughout the new district have been recognized for achievement and improvements in performance.

Section III: Alternatives to Consolidation

In this section, we provide a brief overview of alternatives to consolidation. In general, it appears that districts attempting to avoid full consolidation efforts may instead turn to more flexible arrangements such as collaboration agreements, which allow districts to remain small while still achieving many of the same goals. In fact, Howley and colleagues assert that the next generation of public schools may emphasize smaller size: the authors explain that this push toward “schools and districts that are not so large as to damage learning, especially among impoverished students, reflects the changed priorities and circumstances because the current generation of reformers is focusing on improving outcomes, especially higher achievement.”⁶²

A 2010 report from the Education Policy Center at Michigan State University asserted that “given the resistance at the community level to consolidation of school districts, attention should be given to alternative strategies that could reduce costs and bring quality education to students living in rural or sparsely populated areas of the state of Michigan.” According to the report, coordination or services represents a viable alternative to district consolidation that can reduce costs and help improve the quality of education. Coordination basically involves joint sharing and providing of services or programs between two or more districts in close geographic proximity. Below, we describe three common examples of coordination of services that have been used in some small districts in Michigan.⁶³

- ❖ **Coordination of Administrative Services.** Local boards of education can select a superintendent, or other specialized administrator (curriculum, budget, transportation, special education), who oversees more than one district. Administrative coordination has already been carried out in Michigan districts for math and science centers, technology and technical education centers and materials, staff development, and education for students with special needs.
- ❖ **Program Coordination across Districts.** Neighboring school districts may, on a formal or informal basis, agree to share personnel, programs and equipment to provide needed services to students. Sharing allows districts to remain separate while gaining additional curricular programs of higher quality; it also lets the community keep its own schools and consequently its own identity and vitality. Programs and services that can be shared through this structure include instructional materials, teachers, equipment, ancillary services, transportation, staff development, counseling services, special education and vocational education. This is particularly fitting in Michigan, as intermediate school districts are well situated to help their constituent districts organize these kinds of program and administrative coordination.

⁶² Howley et al. *Op. cit.*, 11.

⁶³ Quoted with slight variation from Shokrani, S. 2010. “School District Consolidation Study in 10 Michigan Counties.” The Education Policy Center at Michigan State University, 4-5.
http://media.mlive.com/news_impact/other/textreport.pdf

- ❖ **Voluntary Inter-District Coordination.** This is a voluntary arrangement made by two or more districts to share services, programs, or resources without resorting to full scale consolidation. The less formalized agreement structure enables school districts to maintain their identity and autonomy while providing quality programs and services at a manageable cost. This form of coordination differs from ISD coordination in that resources and services are shifted from district to district instead of a central location: one district may take a lead on the coordination of one service, while another district may coordinate another service or program.

After assisting districts with conducting consolidation feasibility studies, the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy concluded that “there are a number of areas where increased collaboration may be beneficial” for Indiana school districts. The report provided a short list of areas for which increased opportunities for collaboration should be explored:⁶⁴

- ❖ Sharing services (such as curriculum development or financial management)
- ❖ Negotiating joint purchasing agreements (such as school busses and health insurance) to take advantage of economies of scale
- ❖ Exploring collaborative distance or virtual learning possibilities
- ❖ Collaborating on grant proposals
- ❖ Offering joint professional development opportunities

The report continues by explaining that “further savings and efficiencies can likely be realized through shared services and joint purchasing by school districts. Recommendations for additional ways that districts can achieve savings include:⁶⁵

- ❖ State departments of education, as well as individual school corporations, should continue to explore virtual learning opportunities to expand advanced-level course offerings in smaller school corporations.
- ❖ Options of open enrollment, half-day or flexible scheduling, online instruction, and joint summer school programs between schools could also increase curriculum offerings without consolidation.
- ❖ Tracking expenditure data by line item at the school level will increase the ability of researchers to understand how operational efficiency can be improved and how school expenditure data are linked to student achievement.

⁶⁴ Spradlin et al. Op. cit., 16. (Bullets quoted verbatim)

⁶⁵ Ibid. (Bullets quoted verbatim)

Profiles

Below, we provide profiles for situations in which full consolidation was not recommended to districts facing low enrollment. In most cases, collaboration and cooperation were found to be more suitable solutions for expanding offerings while reducing costs.

Cowan Community Schools and Daleville Community Schools (Delaware County, Indiana)⁶⁶

Combined student enrollment: 1,390

Objective: Satisfy increasing curriculum requirements with limited monetary and personnel resources, and examine the potential to expand opportunities for their students through maximizing the available resources of the two corporations.

Recommendations: To enhance shared course offerings, the school corporations should adopt the same calendar and schedule, provide transportation between the schools for students, implement a half-day model where students would have the option of spending half of the school day taking courses at the other high school, utilize distance learning opportunities, establish a committee to assess joint textbook adoption, and upgrade to a joint student data system. Dual credit offerings could be expanded through increasing ACP programs and enhancing partnerships with Ivy Tech. To streamline administration and save money, have one shared employee for each of the positions of chief financial officer, technology director, maintenance director, and transportation supervisor. With regard to sharing instructional personnel and resources, the corporations should offer a joint summer school program, combine professional development opportunities, house special education pull-out programs in one location, and identify individuals who, when filling vacancies, could teach in both districts. Expand common purchasing and create a unified health insurance plan as areas in which the corporations could benefit by taking advantage of economies of scale.

Outcome: In addition to continuing to provide shared curriculum offerings to students, the school corporations are furthering discussions with respect to sharing personnel as well as looking into the possibility of sharing classes through the use of technology.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 9. (Quoted with slight variation)

*Frontier, North White, Tri County, and Twin Lakes School Corporations (White County, Indiana)*⁶⁷

Combined student enrollment: 5,257

Objective: Identify opportunities for merging services or consolidation that would redirect more dollars to support classroom instruction.

Recommendations: Individual school boards must examine the merits of the various consolidation scenarios on the basis of criteria such as what each district is willing to change or reorganize to gain cost savings, what provides the most effective way to coordinate programs and services between county schools and districts, and what offers the most improved learning opportunities and is in the best interest of the students. Potentially increase collaboration with Ivy Tech to expand educational opportunities for students and adults in the county and create additional distance learning and collaboration opportunities.

Outcomes: The process of increasing collaboration has begun by opening enrollment for all summer school courses, conducting combined bus inspections, collaborating on a grant to increase technology throughout the county, and adopting a common school calendar in at least three of the four school corporations. The four school corporations in White County meet on a regular basis to discuss ways to increase sharing of services and personnel.

*Clinton Central and Clinton Prairie School Corporations (Clinton County, Indiana)*⁶⁸

Combined student enrollment: 2,068

Objective: Investigate opportunities for sharing services and consolidating operations to eliminate duplication, reduce costs, and improve student success. Examine potential gains and costs through changes in the availability of student programs through consolidation, sharing mental health and counseling services, providing joint preschool and kindergarten programs, expanding and improving virtual learning and technology, merging equipment purchases, sharing a transportation facility and non-route buses, sharing administrative and academic facilities (i.e. an auditorium, swimming pool, laboratories, office space, etc.), and potential benefits of combined staffing.

Recommendations: Consolidating the school corporations was found to be an oversimplistic solution; instead, collaborative planning of programs and sharing

⁶⁷ Ibid. (Quoted with slight variation)

⁶⁸ Ibid., 10. (Quoted with slight variation)

operations and resources were recommended. Establish a Common Curriculum Coordinating Committee, coordinate technology services through meetings between technology coordinators, hold quarterly meetings of the Consolidated and Shared Services Committee, co-convene both corporations' Boards of Education annually, initiate a combined preschool program, and consolidate administrative offices into one central location with separate spaces for each corporation.

*North Judson-San Pierre and Oregon Davis School Corporations*⁶⁹

Combined student enrollment: 2,159

Objective: Explore ways merged or shared services could increase economic efficiency and improve the quality of services.

Recommendations: Gains in economic efficiency would be generated by utilizing economies of scale and reducing duplication of personnel and services (including central offices, course offerings, provision of student services, and arrangements for food, transportation, custodial, and maintenance services); improved services would result from redeploying existing fiscal and human resources to maximize benefits.

Outcomes: The school corporations are collaborating through sharing convocations and presentations, providing joint education services in special education (JESSE), participating in a dual credit program with area colleges, promoting the Starke County Initiative for Life Long Learning (SCILL), and offering the Marshall-Starke Head-Start program.

Long-term planning: Consider the following as potential areas for future collaboration and merging of services: providing a collaborative early childhood program, sharing technology and food service directors, developing collaborative grant proposals, creating opportunities for joint professional development, and sharing media resources. Academic offerings to students in both districts could be enhanced by increasing course offerings (business education, vocational, foreign language, advanced, and agricultural), expanding dual credit opportunities, and exploring distance learning possibilities.

Outcomes: The authors of the study drafted a joint resolution for merged or shared services, which would create a Joint Services Board composed of two board members and an alternate from both school corporations to further the discussion and investigation of merging or sharing services between the corporations. The school corporations are working to establish a joint committee to look at the possibilities for collaboration as recommended in the study.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 11. (Quoted with slight variation)

*Rochester, Caston, and Tippecanoe Valley School Corporations (Fulton and Kosciusko counties, Indiana)*⁷⁰

Combined student enrollment: 4,882

Objective: Identify opportunities for merging services to provide greater funding to support instruction.

Recommendations: Four areas have the most potential for merging services: corporate-level personnel, instructional personnel and instructional resources, course offerings in the high school curriculum, and joint service agreements. With regard to sharing corporate-level personnel, the school corporations should employ a chief financial officer/business manager, a director of technology, a maintenance director, and a transportation supervisor to serve the respective needs of all three corporations. Instructional personnel and resources could be shared by offering a joint summer school program in a central location for high school students and determining if individuals filling vacancies could share teaching responsibilities between corporations. High school curriculum offerings could be enhanced by adopting a similar school year calendar and schedule for the school day, enabling them to share course offerings. Additionally, joint committees should be created for textbook adoption and curriculum formatting, distance learning opportunities should be expanded, and the three school corporations should adopt an open enrollment policy for all students. The school corporations could also create a standardized benefit package for all employees and review service contracts to take advantage of economies of scale and reduce costs at the corporation level.

Outcomes: The school corporations have held a meeting in which the discussion centered on possible vendors and pricing for the population study, potential funding for planning and implementing various aspects of collaboration, and establishing short- and long-term goals. Short-term goals included touring the buildings in each of the districts, examining areas for transportation collaboration, investigating options for centralizing summer school operations, and sharing course offerings through open enrollment. Long-term goals included partnering between corporations to provide an alternative school.

⁷⁰ Ibid. (Quoted with slight variation)

*Tippecanoe School Corporation (Tippecanoe County, Indiana)*⁷¹

Combined student enrollment: 19,720⁷²

Objective: Examine the advantages and disadvantages consolidation, particularly in the areas of curriculum, facilities, financial and governance implications, and technology.

Recommendations: The results of the studies informed further discussion regarding the proposed merger:

- ❖ *Curriculum:* the study found that the three districts already offered comprehensive programs, and that a merger would not improve these offerings.
- ❖ *Facilities:* the study found that a merger would have minimal effect on the need for facilities.
- ❖ *Finance and Governance:* the study found that savings on central office administrative staffing would be less than a fraction of one percent of the merged district's operating expenses. Combined staffing tables indicated similar class sizes and teaching assignments as in the individual districts. A merger would require renegotiation of the three district labor agreements.
- ❖ *Technology:* the study found that technology infrastructures in the three districts were not fully compatible and would incur expenses in order to be successfully merged.

Ultimately, the merger was rejected, and cooperation and collaboration became the new strategy; the overall review of data suggested that economies of scale had already been realized in the individual districts, and it thus did not make sense to consolidate. Further, the districts each concluded that any potential gains in funding from the merger would not offset the loss of local control.

Outcome: To advance cooperation and collaboration efforts, the three district school boards created a joint committee that meets annually to explore new ways of collaborating. The committee identified the following areas for which cooperation may result in benefits to the individual districts:

- ❖ Inter-district student mobility issues
- ❖ Consistent curricular scope and sequence to assure that students transferring across districts can maintain their courses of study
- ❖ Implementing an International Baccalaureate Program

⁷¹ "County School Districts: Research and Policy Consolidations." Op. cit., 8. Citing Plucker, J., Spradlin, T., Magaro, M., Chien, R., and Zapf, J. "Assessing the policy environment for school corporation collaboration, cooperation and consolidation in Indiana." Education Policy Brief, 5:5.
<http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED497535.pdf>

⁷² Data provided for 2004-2005 academic year.

- ❖ Coordinating dual enrollment/dual credit with Purdue University and the local community college
- ❖ Coordinating summer school program offerings
- ❖ Extracurricular activity/sports coordination, including transportation, officiating, coaching, facilities and purchasing
- ❖ Special education and other special student services

Jasper County School District (Ridgeland, South Carolina)

*Combined student enrollment: 3,366*⁷³

Objective: Address issues related to vacancies and limited program offerings.

Recommendations: To help establish a consolidation plan for the district's schools, a team of consultants conducted a study based on information from state and local websites and focus groups. The study presented four options for the district to consider:⁷⁴

- ❖ Establish a special school, (such as a STEM or magnet) that would expand upper-level courses. Consolidate low-enrollment upper-level courses from both high schools. Re-zoning might be necessary to balance enrollment.
- ❖ Re-zone and create pre-kindergarten through sixth grade and seventh through 12th-grade schools at both facilities. Offer specialty programs (STEM, virtual, early college).
- ❖ House prekindergarten through 6th grade at each campus, 6th through 8th graders at one facility, and 9th through 12th graders at the other facility. Offer specialty programs.
- ❖ Rezone to create better student balance and maintain existing grade structure. Offer specialty programs.⁷⁵

The first two options present the advantage of not increasing student bus-ride times. An advantage of the third option is that having grades 9 through 12 in Hardeeville would allow for expanded athletic facilities; however, the disadvantage of this option involves the necessary re-routing of buses and a large movement of students. The fourth option helps the district lessen space problems at Ridgeland's site and prevents total re-routing of buses, but may require more staff and money. The district is currently carrying out discussions regarding the proposed merging of several of its

⁷³ Data provided for 2009-2010 academic year from: "Search for Public School Districts." National Center for Education Statistics. <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/>

⁷⁴ Garzilli, A. "School consolidation raises questions." *Bluffton Today*, June 10, 2012. <http://www.blufftontoday.com/hardeeville/2012-06-10/school-consolidation-raises-questions#.T-IrvpGmGub>

⁷⁵ Ibid. (Bullets quoted verbatim)

schools, and is working to keep all stakeholders informed about all options and decisions through public meetings, flyers, radio interviews, and newspaper inserts in English and Spanish.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Information posted on district website, accessed June 21, 2012. Jasper County School District.
<http://www.jcsd.net/>

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