

Is Bigger Always Better?

A Comparison of Small and Large Schools.

A Special Project

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FACULTY APPROVAL

Is Bigger Always Better?

A Comparison of Small and Large Schools.

Approved for the Faculty

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ABSTRACT

The author was searching for factors that caused students to move from small high schools to larger neighboring ones. Six schools were chosen for the study, three small high schools with less than 100 student's grades 7 – 12, and three larger neighboring high schools grades 9 -12. Students moved from the small high schools to larger neighboring high schools for additional academic choices, as well as social and athletic opportunities. Other factors that caused students to move from small high schools to larger neighboring high schools were personal beliefs and choices.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background for the Project

In the early days of this country, education was left for the elite. Education was accomplished by tutoring and small, one room schools. When the Revolutionary War concluded, Congress enacted a bill that encouraged education for all. The Land Ordinance of 1785 and Northwest Ordinance of 1787 set aside land for the building of schools (VanZant, 2005).

The one room schools usually housed 30 to 40 students of all ages and abilities. The sole teacher was usually an unmarried woman (PBS, 2001). In some of the larger one room schools, the teacher would teach to the higher level and older students, in turn would teach to the younger and lower level students. Often the school would only be open several months out of the year, usually when children were not needed to work at home or on the farm.

As more and more children started attending school, the one room schools could no longer handle the demand for education for all the children which were at many different levels and ages. The government and some states started to draw up requirements for education. The easiest way to overcome the crowded and falling down buildings was to build new buildings with many different classrooms, and some even had separate lunch rooms and gymnasiums.

Eventually, schools began consolidating and students came to the schools from surrounding communities.

Guidelines for teachers started to become more evident. Teachers had training to teach certain subjects and levels. The main question still needed to be answered. What would be the best way to split up the classes, in respect to students' levels and needs? The best answer was to split the classes according to age levels (VanZant, 2005). At the beginning many small schools grouped the students together with several ages in one room. Grades 1, 2, and 3 were together, while grades 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 were in another area. If the student happened to move past eighth grade the student would usually go on to college.

As the population grew and expanded westward, the need for larger school districts became clear. Eventually, the grades were separated into levels, and mandates were set for what was required to be taught at each grade. The rise of elementary schools and secondary schools came about as the result of growth in population and required levels of accomplishment. Middle and high schools were added years later (PBS, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

The study would examine reasons students decided to move from smaller schools, less than 100 students, to larger neighboring schools to finish high school.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this study was to look into the differences of course offerings, construction of student's day, class blocks or traditional class periods and graduation requirements. This project was to determine why several students moved to larger neighboring high schools to finish high school, while some stayed at smaller high schools.

Delimitations

The study compared the curriculum of three larger high schools to three smaller high schools in Eastern Washington State. Three were in rural communities, with a population of less than 300 people, and the other 3 were in larger towns with populations from 2,800 to 18,000 people. The study was conducted from the fall of 2006 to the spring of 2007. The following table shows the differences of the schools used for this study.

Table 1. Enrollment Analysis

	Size of Building	Student Population	Number of Staff Members	Free or Reduced-Priced Meals	On-Time Graduation Rate
School A	7-12	41	13	49.3%	95%
School 1	9-12	529	35	60.6%	78%
School B	7-12	57	13	59.2%	77%
School 2	9-12	1629	81	39.3%	75%
School C	7-12	80	16	13.4%	100%
School 3	9-12	721	45	23.2%	84%

Assumptions

All the high schools used appropriate curriculum, and GLE's were used as a teaching guide. Each school employed highly qualified teachers. The author paired the schools together, for example a small school was labeled with a single letter, and a larger school was labeled with a single number. School A was a rural school and school 1 was a larger school 16 miles away. School B and School 2 were in the same geographic area and School C and School 3 were similarly located.

The author assumed that all teachers were properly educated, and obtained the appropriate teaching certificate. All students were treated fairly and equally in each of the six schools. Each student was placed in the proper level of class; not too easy, nor too difficult.

Research Question

What factors cause students to move from small schools to larger neighboring ones?

Significance of the Project

This research focused on why small schools were important to the life of small towns. When the town lost the school the town disappeared. When a small town school shut down permanently the only sign left of civilization was the gas station and U.S. Post Office.

The author discovered many positives of small schools. Students knew each person in the small school atmosphere. If an unknown person walked into the school, the person was noticed instantly and the correct action was taken. All students participated in some or all activities such as student government, sports, and clubs. In small schools, teachers knew parents and students along with each family's history and background.

Procedure

The author chose three sets of schools, three small high schools with less than 100 student's grades 7-12 and three neighboring larger high schools grades 9-12, to compare curriculum, construction of student's day, class blocks or traditional class periods and graduation requirements. The schools were placed into pairs. A small school was labeled with a single letter (A, B, C), and a larger school was labeled with a single number (1, 2, 3). A letter was sent to each of the six schools asking for a curriculum packet so a comparison of curriculum was completed. The author also requested information that dealt with graduation requirements and construction of student's day.

Four students were chosen for an interview. Two of the students attended a small school. The other two students moved from a small school to a larger neighboring high school. The author also conducted interviews with each of the students' parents. Each interview consisted of five questions, worded for the

parents and students. The questions asked covered reasons why students moved, course offerings, and athletic participation.

Definition of Terms

GLE- Resources aligned to the grade level expectations to support curriculum development, instructional practices, and assessment of student learning.

Curriculum- A written document of “what” the student should be taught. GLE’s are examples of curriculum teacher’s use.

WASL- Washington Assessment of Student Learning. A test given in Washington State to test student learning during the student’s school career.

Acronyms

<u>NCES.</u>	National Center for Education Statistics
<u>STAR.</u>	Student Teacher Achievement Ration
<u>ESL.</u>	English as a Second Language
<u>OSPI.</u>	Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
<u>SAT.</u>	Scholastic Aptitude Test
<u>ACT.</u>	American College Test
<u>AP.</u>	Advanced Placement

CHAPTER 2

Review of Selected Literature

Introduction

Loose the school, you loose the town. When a small town school shut down permanently the only sign of civilization was the gas station and U.S. Post Office. The schools were safer than larger schools. If an unknown person walked into the school, the person was noticed instantly and the correct action was taken. All students knew each person in the small school atmosphere. “Small school reported higher rates of attendance and fewer instances of truancy, violence, drug and alcohol abuse, vandalism, and classroom disruptions” (Phi Delta Kappa International, 2007). In small schools, teachers knew parents and students along with each family’s history and background. In larger schools this was more difficult to find. Also, graduation rates in small schools were higher than larger schools.

Academic Achievement

“Size-achievement relationship is not clear, though some research indicates smaller schools facilitate higher achievement” (Cotton, 1996). About half of the research found no difference between the achievement levels of students in large and small schools, including some alternative schools. The other half found student achievement in small schools superior to larger schools; while none of the research found large schools superior to small schools in the

achievement effects. Thus, researchers safely said student achievement of small schools, less than 100 students was at least equal, and often superior, to student achievement large schools. Achievement measures used for the research included schools grades, test scores, honor roll membership, and subject-area achievement (Boss, 2000).

Class size had more of an impact on graduation rates. Based on the NCES data for 2000-01, researchers found the lower the student-teacher ratio, the higher the graduation rate at a school. The impact was especially strong for black and Latino students. The NCES found a distinct increase in graduation rates as the ratios of students to teachers decreased. For example, graduation rates for black females hovered around 80 percent in schools with the most students per teacher and rose to over 85 percent in schools with the fewest students per teacher. The graduation rate for Hispanic males was a little over 55 percent in schools with high ratios and rose to near 70 percent in the lowest student-teacher ratio schools (McAdoo, 2006).

The benefits of smaller classes were widely acknowledged. Few education issues had been studied more than the effect of class size and student achievement. Tennessee's class-size study, STAR project began in the mid-1980s (McAdoo, 2006). Students were assigned randomly to one of three treatment conditions. Standard class had one certified teacher and more than 20 students. Supplemental classes had one teacher and a full-time, non-certificated teacher's

aide. Small classes consisted of one teacher and about 15 students. The study began in the fall of 1985 with a cohort of students beginning kindergarten. The study design called for each student to attend the same type of class for four years.

Primary schools throughout Tennessee were invited to participate in the study, but each school had to agree to remain in the study for four years and have at least 57 kindergarten age children to participate. The first year of the project involved 79 schools, 328 classrooms, and about 6,300 students. Schools came from all corners of the state, represented urban, inner-city, suburban, and rural school districts. The student sample contained both majority students and a large number of African-Americans and students from impoverished homes who received free lunches.

The second year of the study, several problems had arisen and the project had to be revised. Families had moved and children who had participated in STAR classes the previous year were now living somewhere else or children had been held back for a second year of kindergarten. These factors meant there were vacant seats in all three types of STAR classes and at the beginning of year two, other families had moved into the district to fill the openings. The same factors also continued into the third and fourth years of the program, while proper adjustments were made. Yet, by this time some students had been exposed to the whole four years of the study (Biddle & Berliner, 2002).

Assessment of how each student had scored in the STAR study was given at the conclusion of each school year using the Stanford Achievement Test battery. The test generated separate achievement scores for reading, word-study skills, and mathematics. Long term exposure to small classes, in the early grades, had generated substantially higher levels of achievement and extra gains associated with long-term exposure to small classes. Higher levels of achievement in the early grades were greater the longer students were exposed to small classes. In smaller classes researchers found students were 0.5 months ahead by the end of the kindergarten year, 1.9 months ahead at the end of first grade, 5.6 months ahead in second grade, and 7.1 months ahead by the end of third grade (Biddle & Berliner, 2002).

When looking at the long term effects, the STAR students were given the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills as an end-of-the-year assessment which provided scores for four topics; reading, mathematics, science, and social science. These scores were expressed as months of average achievement of students from different types of STAR classes. When a typical student who had experienced one or more years of small classes in early grades reached grade eight, students were 4.1 months ahead in reading, 3.4 months ahead in mathematics, 4.3 months ahead in science, and 4.8 months ahead in social science.

Students who had attended small classes enjoyed other advantages in upper grades. The students earned better grades on average, fewer had dropped

out of school and over the years fewer had been retained a grade. Once a student entered high school, more small-class students opted to learn foreign languages, more took advanced-level courses, more were found in the top 25 percent of the classes, more graduated from high school, and more volunteered to take the ACT and SAT exams (Biddle & Berliner, 2002).

According to the National Education Association (2002) students enrolled in small classes as youngsters were 72 percent more likely to graduate on time. The students also completed more advanced mathematics and English courses, plus graduated with honors.

Student Attitudes

“Students in a small high school experiences an increasingly more positive attitude towards school” (Cotton, 1996, p. 5). When schools were small enough that students and teachers knew each another well, schools took on a friendlier atmosphere. Cotton (1996) looked into school-size research and uncovered benefits for both students and teachers in smaller learning communities. Compared with peers in larger schools, students in small schools, defined as 300 to 400 students for elementary school and 400 to 800 for secondary school, had more positive attitudes toward school, behaved better, participated in varied extracurricular activities, were less likely to drop out, had better attendance, and a greater sense of belonging. Intimacy was a big part of the appeal of smaller schools. Students were quicker to connect and less likely to feel

anonymous or alienated in a smaller community of learners. Students took more responsibility for learning; learning activities were more often individualized, experimental, and relevant to the world outside of school; classes were generally smaller, and scheduling was more flexible (Boss, 2000).

The student's level of extracurricular participation was significantly higher in small schools than larger ones. Researchers had found students in small schools were more involved in a greater variety of activities and derived more satisfactions from participation than students in large schools. Students in the large schools were more polarized, with a group of active participants at one end of the continuum and a large group of students who did not participate in any extracurricular activities at the other. In the small schools there were few students who did not participate in anything (Cotton, 1996).

The greater and more varied participation in extracurricular activities by students was the single best-support finding in the school size research. Like the findings in other areas, findings about participation held true regardless of setting and were most applicable to minority and low socioeconomic students. Research had identified important relationships between extracurricular participation and other desirable outcomes, such as positive attitudes and social behavior; these findings were especially significant. Nonetheless, smaller schools created an environment where good things happened (Cotton, 1996).

Parent Involvement

Parent involvement was defined as ongoing participation of a child's education (NWREL, 1999). The author recognized there were several different ways a parent could participate. Parents supported the children's education, attended school functions, sports activities, field trips or holiday celebrations. The parents responded to school obligations, like parent-teacher conferences and open-house. Parents became more involved with the children's schoolwork, provided encouragement, arranged appropriate study time and space, modeled desired behavior, monitored homework, and actively tutored the children at home. Away from the home, parents served as school advocates. During school activities the parent volunteered or worked with the student's classroom (Wikelund, 2001).

Research overwhelmingly demonstrated parent involvement of children's learning positively related to achievement. Further, the research proved the more intensively parents were involved with children's learning, the more beneficial the achievement effects. The most effective parent involvement was parents that worked directly with children learning activities at home. Programs that involved parents were reading books at home, supporting homework assignments, or tutoring children showed particularly impressive results. More active parent involvement produced greater achievement benefits than passive ones. If, parents received phone calls, read and signed written communication from school,

attended parent teacher conferences, greater achievement benefits accrued, rather than no parent involvement (Cotton, 1989).

More research had been conducted with middle, secondary students and families. Parent involvement remains beneficial; promoting positive achievement and effective outcomes for older students. Parents generally became less involved when children grew older for many reasons: schools were bigger and farther from home, curriculum more sophisticated, each student had several teachers, parents of older students were more likely to be employed, students established a sense of separation and independence from the parents. For these reasons, the kinds of parent involvement engaged in with younger children were no longer relevant or useful. The research on the effectiveness of parent involvement with older students, therefore, often focused on different forms of participation. For example, parents monitored homework, helped student make postsecondary plans and selected courses that supported the postsecondary plans. Parents were in agreement with the school on behavioral improvement plans. The school agreed to continue regular home-school communication about student's progress as well as continued parent attendance at school sponsored activities. Clearly, parent involvement was effective in fostering achievement and affective gains at all levels (Sprunger, 2007).

School staff wished to introduce effective programs would need to be both open-minded and well organized to engage parent participation. Most successful parent participation efforts offered parents a variety of roles in the context of a well organized and long lasting program. Parents would need to be able to choose from a range of activities which accommodated different schedules, preferences, and capabilities. Teachers and administrators had assessed the schools readiness for involved parents and determine how to engage and utilize the parents. Ways to involve parents were to develop programs that included a focus on parent involvement in instruction; conducted activities with children in the home, assisted with homework and monitored and encouraged activities of older children. Disadvantaged students with parental involvement benefited the greatest. The school continued to emphasize parental partnership as an essential component in the student's scholastic growth (Boss, 2000).

Safety

How did school patrons respond to violence that occurred in our country's schools? The students received tougher consequences for violent acts, increased suspensions and expulsions and increased gun control laws. Research indicated protective factors helped children overcome some negative influences. Key features of families, schools and communities that had protected children were; caring and support, positive expectations, and ongoing opportunities for participation.

According to the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (2001), “. . . . the state of our school is not the problem itself, but a reflection of the condition of the larger society.” Schools developed programs that identified antisocial behavior in young children and helped the children develop positive social skills. School administrators in conjunction with other local programs helped children, including family support agencies, mental health services, county juvenile departments and law enforcement agencies. Any of the effective programs did help students develop healthy behavior patterns, including leadership and school success, honesty and integrity, attachment and commitment to family, community, schools and peers (NWREL, 2001).

Parents did have influence on the children’s safety by the respect the parents had shown and listened to the needs of the children. The parents also encouraged children to try new skills and learn from mistakes. Treating the children as responsible family members allowed the children to experience the satisfaction of completed work. Constantly reminding children there are multiple solutions to virtually every problem and there was not a problem that could not be solved. Treat guns and violence as permanent non-solutions to temporary problems. Parents watched for warning signs in children of potential violence by the harm of animals which was often concluded that children had been physically or sexually abused. Violence that was a threat should have been taken seriously especially if the child used descriptions of how and where the violence would take

place (NWREL, 2001). Withdrawing from usual social activities, showing a strong interest in guns or violence, the lost of ability to manage daily activities, peer rejections, signs of depression, aggression and anxiety were all signs of violence (NASP, 2002). “Preventing school violence; noticing when we have troubled kids and connecting those kids to the right services” (Sherman, 2002, p. 5).

Good social skills were critical to successful function in life. These skills enabled the children to know what to say, how to make good choices, and how to behave in varied situations. Most children picked up positive skills through everyday interactions with adults and peers, educators and parents reinforced this casual learning with direct and indirect instruction. Educators and parents needed to recognize when and where children picked up behaviors that might have been detrimental to the development and safety of children. Schools have relied on families to teach children important interpersonal and conflict resolution skills. However, increased negative societal influences and demands on family life made this vital for schools to partner with parents to facilitate that social learning process. Particularly true given the critical role social skills played in maintaining a positive school environment and the reduction of school violence (NASP, 2002). Peers had involvement in school safety as well. Student’s reported speech or behavior threats to a responsible adult, and established respectful relationship with caring adults and peers on campus. The student’s respected the

emotions and protected the rights of all people at schools and provided adult counselors and peer ground for the students. Students developed an anger management plan to go through when problems occurred; pause to calm down, think rationally, identify the problem, and identify consequences of violent actions and nonviolent alternative actions that would have resolved the problem (Sherman, 2002).

Summary

Researchers could safely state student achievement of small schools was at least equal, and often superior, to student achievement of large schools.

Achievement was measured by schools grades, test scores, honor roll membership, and subject area achievement. Compared with peers in larger schools, students in small schools, had more positive attitudes towards school, behaved better, participated in varied extracurricular activities, were less likely to drop out, had better attendance, and a greater sense of belonging (Boss, 2000).

Research overwhelmingly demonstrated parent involvement of children's learning positively related to achievement (Cotton, 1989). Lastly, school safety in small schools was highly effective. If an unknown person walked into the school, the person was noticed instantly and the correct action was taken.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology and Treatment of Data

Introduction

The small schools across the United States faced unique challenges. Do the schools combine with larger neighboring schools or do the smaller schools face the world alone with the possibility of slipping away without being noticed? Many small schools began offering more advanced classes, listening to parent's wants and needs and combining with neighboring small schools. The main reason for consolidation was to have a large enough number to hold open the doors from possibly shutting the whole school followed by losing an entire town.

Methodology

The author used a qualitative study. The purpose of this study was to gather information looking at reasons students moved from small high schools, with less than 100 students to larger neighboring high schools. The author interviewed four high school students' parents along with the students. Also requests were sent to three small schools of less than 100 students and three larger neighboring high schools requesting information dealing with course descriptions, graduation requirements and sport offered.

Participants

The participants were two students who attended a small school and two students who had moved to the larger neighboring high school along with the four parents. The participants were chosen at random from two different groups; one group chose to stay in a small high school while the others chose to attend larger neighboring high school. The interviews were conducted in March 2007.

Instrument

The instruments used were an interview consisting of five questions (see the Appendix, page 42) and a letter (see the Appendix, page 41) mailed to the six high schools used in this study requesting information. The interviews were conducted at various locations; the author's home and the participant's homes. Information requested from the schools was course descriptions, graduation requirements and sports offered. The inventory was used to compare small high school to larger ones.

Design

The study was a qualitative design with the use of letters and interviews. The interviews consisted of five questions. The second instrument that was used for this study was a letter. A letter was sent to each of the six high schools requesting information about course descriptions, graduation requirement and sports offered.

Procedure

The author composed a letter that was sent to the high schools requesting information about course descriptions, graduation requirements and sports offered with a postage paid envelope. The author made calls to schools that had not responded within a several week period and left messages. School C asked for another copy of the letter and another copy was sent the next day. Some schools had yet to respond and the author sent emails as reminders.

The author called and set up appointments with the participants to conduct the interviews. The interviews were conducted with the student and parent in different rooms in order to assure spontaneity and confidentiality.

Treatment of the Data

Of the six high schools the author included in the study, three being less than 100 students and three larger neighboring high schools. All of the schools offered Freshman, Sophomore, Junior and Senior English (see the Appendix, page 35). The Mathematics classes offered at all six schools were Geometry, Algebra 2, Trigonometry, Pre-Calculus, and Calculus. Science classes offered at all six schools were Physical Science, Biology, Chemistry, and Physics. Again basic History was offered at each school, U.S. History, World History, and Current World Problems. Agriscience, Business, Fine Arts, Music, Health and Fitness, and Spanish were offered at all six schools. School 3, a larger school offered a wide variety of English, Mathematics, Science, and History classes to

the students. While School A offered many of the same classes as School 1, and 2. School C and 3 offered many Honors and AP courses for the students. School A chose to offer several different Honors course for the students rather than AP courses because of the flexibility for the school district. English as a second language (ESL) students were accommodated at School 1 and 3 in English, Study Skills, Science, and History, while there were not specific classes offered for the students at the other schools in the study.

According to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) (see the Appendix, page 39) all high schools students in the state of Washington must complete at least 19 credits to earn a high school diploma, grades 9 through 12. The small schools, School A, B and C were all considered high school grades 7 through 12 because the students were all placed under the same roof. While Schools 1, 2 and 3 were considered high schools grades 9 through 12. School A's graduation requirement was 26.5 credits; School 1, 26 credits; School B, 28.5 credits; School 2 and C, 28 credits; and School 3, 23 credits.

The author discovered a reason for the differences in credits relating to graduation requirements. School A, 1 and B were all traditional, 50 minute periods, which required more credits for graduation. But School 2 consisted of four, 90 minute blocks, requiring fewer credits to graduate. Then School 3 had three, 100 minute blocks each day and in return required even fewer credits to graduate.

The OSPI also had specific recommendations for students planning to attend a four year institution of higher learning. Each of the six schools recommended identical basic courses with School 1, 2 and C recommending additional basic credits in Social Science and Science (see the Appendix, page 40).

Summary

The author used a qualitative study to gather information looking at reasons students moved from small high schools, with less than 100 students, to larger neighboring high schools. The study analyzed graduation requirements to receive a general high school diploma, entrance requirements to a four year institution, along with each schools' course offerings.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis of the Data

Introduction

Community members residing where the small schools were located were passionate about the community and the school that was the glue holding the community together. When students moved to larger neighboring high schools the entire community came together to offer reasons for students to stay, otherwise the community and school went on the defensive. If too many students moved out, the town had the probability of losing the school followed by the entire town.

Description of the Environment

The study compared the curriculum of three larger high schools to three smaller high schools in Eastern Washington State. Three schools were in rural communities, with a population of less than 300 people, and the other three were in larger communities with populations of 2,800 to 18,000 people. The goal of this research was to understand the reasons for students moving from small high schools to larger neighboring high schools.

Research Question

What factors cause students to move from small schools to larger neighboring ones?

Results of the Study

The first, two questions of the interview (see the Appendix, page 42) dealt with how the students felt about students moving to larger neighboring high schools and why the students thought the move had occurred. The third question asked what the student's class schedule consisted of. The fourth question, to students asked if the classes offered would prepare the students for college. Lastly, the author wanted to compare sport programs and asked the students a question about which sports the students played.

Student 1 attended high school at School A. When the author interviewed the student and parent, strong negative feelings become clear about fellow students moving to a larger neighboring high school. Parent A stated, "We have the potential to loose an entire school district because of them moving out." Parent C and Student 3 who also attended School A, had differing feelings about students moving to the neighboring high school. Parent C response was, "I think it's fine. If they want to do that it's fine. That's up to the family." Student C had close to the same response, "Personally I kind of think more power to them. Well, they seem to enjoy it so I guess that works. There's lots more opportunities and more people."

The author interviewed Parent B and Student 2 who had moved from School A to School 1. When the author posed the question of why the student moved Parent B responded, "Because she wanted to have more opportunities to

...more class opportunities. The student had more opportunities to do extracurricular activities and more less, to get the student prepared for college.” When the author asked Student 2 that same question, the student replied, “I moved because they’re more opportunities for me in sports, academic and just social.” Student 4 also moved from School 1 to School A to finish high school. The author also asked the question of Student 4. Student 4 replied, “The neighboring high school was a lot bigger school with more classes, a lot more people and better sports program. I got tired of the same old thing at my old high school, same classes and same old people.”

Each of the four students were taking courses to fit the student’s ability level. Student 1’s a Junior and Student 3 a Freshman were both attending School 1. Student 1’s courses consisted of Ag Construction, English 3, Physics, Contemporary World Problems, Careers, Spanish 2 and Algebra 2. Student 3’s classes consisted of Band, Basic Mathematics, Algebra 1, English, Biology and World History.

Findings

School A and 1’s school day consisted of seven 50 minute periods. School B’s scheduled the students with an eight class periods per day. First through seventh period were core classes. The eighth period was solely for electives. Each class was worth .5 credits per class per semester. School 2’s classes were in four 90 minute blocks per day. Each semester the students earned

one credit, which equaled to two credits per 90 minute block per school year. School C offered zero through eighth periods at 50 minutes each. However, the students only needed to attend seven periods per day. Consequently the students could start early in the morning and finish early in the afternoon or start later and finish later. School 3 required the fewest amount of credits, because, the students' attended three class periods a day each being 100 minutes long.

School A did not believe in offering AP courses to the students. The school district decided to offer Honors classes because the school didn't want national regulations to be running the school. The school district and parents came together to decide what would be best for the students. When the Honors class contained one or two students the teacher did still offer the class, but, usually, the class was combined with another class for those who wished to have Honors on college transcripts.

School 1 did not offer any Honors classes to Freshman or Sophomores. The student had to wait until Junior and Senior years to start any Honors or AP courses. Honors English and Honors Algebra 2 were the only Honors courses offered at School 1. While the school offered AP courses in Senior English, Biology and U.S. History. School 1 offered many remedial classes along with ESL classes for the students that had a difficult time with the English language. School 1 had a large amount of seasonal farm worker families coming into the school district that needed to be accommodated.

School 3 was located in a college town, the school offered many upper end classes for the students. School 3 offered numerous Honors and AP classes but few remedial classes. Because the school resided in a small college town many of the parents probably worked at the college and the students were pushed to take higher level courses.

Discussion

The author sent letters to each of the six schools requesting a curriculum packet, graduation requirements and sports offered. Each school responded with information that had been requested and the author followed by emails and phone calls for additional information as needed.

The larger schools offered more classes to the students as to be expected. Yet, several small schools offered many of the same classes. Classes offered at small school depended on student's request for the classes and were arranged if at all possible. The larger schools were in block schedules with 90 or 100 minutes periods. The smaller schools tended to stay with the traditional seven periods of 50 minutes. Because of the construction of the school days the graduation requirements tended to vary also. Block schedule schools did not require as many credits to graduate as traditional schedule schools.

Eight interviews were conducted, four students and four parents. The participants were two students who attended a small school and two students who had moved to the larger neighboring high school along with the four parents. The

participants were chosen at random from two different groups; one group chose to stay in a small high school while the others chose to attend larger neighboring high school. The interviews consisted of five questions covering reasons why students moved, course offerings and athletic participation. When the author interviewed a parent from a small school, strong negative feelings became evident about fellow students moving to a larger neighboring high school. The parent clearly stated, “We have the potential to lose an entire school district because of them moving out.” When looking over the interviews people from the small communities appeared extremely possessive of the small schools and were afraid of losing the school followed by the town.

Summary

Students moved from small high schools to larger neighboring high schools for additional academic choices, social reasons and sports opportunities. Personal beliefs and family choices were the main factors for students moving from small high schools to larger neighboring high schools

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

There have been interesting research findings that dealt with reasons students moved to larger neighboring high schools or stayed in the small local high schools. These findings provided a unique glimpse into personal feelings of parents and students who stayed or moved.

Summary

In the early days of this country, education was left for the elite. Later Congress enacted a bill that encouraged education for all. As more and more children started attending school, the one room schools could no longer handle the demand for education for all children that were at many different level and ages (PBS, 2001). The author was looking into the differences of course offerings, graduation requirements for a high school diploma, and the requirements to attend a four year institution.

Literature the author reviewed started with the relationships of academic achievement and children who attended small schools while in elementary school. Second was student's attitude towards academics in small schools. Parent involvement was an important factor to the success of children's education and safety of the children in large and small schools was of utmost importance to all.

Qualitative research was used for this study. The participants were four students who attended a small school and four students who had moved to the larger neighboring high school along with the parents.

Conclusions

Students moved from small high schools to larger neighboring high schools for additional academic choices, social reasons and sports opportunities. Factors that caused students to move from the small high school to larger neighboring high schools were personal beliefs and choices. The author never spoke with a student who simply moved because the smaller school was a bad place typically the reason was because of more social opportunities.

Recommmendations

The author would be interested to see what the results would produce when the study was done in an urban area. There still are several small school districts in Western Washington which could be compared to larger high schools. The author would be curious to see what the parents and students would say with the same interview questions. Would the parents and students be as possessive of the small schools? What classes and sports are offered? Is there such a variance in graduation requirements?

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APPENDIX

Figure 1. Courses offered.

	School A	School 1	School B	School 2	School C	School 3
Freshman English Level 1						X
Freshman English Level 2						X
Freshman English	X	X	X	X	X	X
Honors Freshman English	X			X		X
Sophomore English Level 1						X
Sophomore English Level 2						X
Sophomore English	X	X	X	X	X	X
Honors Sophomore English	X			X		X
Junior English	X	X	X	X	X	X
Honors Junior English	X	X			X	
AP Junior English				X		X
Senior English	X	X	X		X	X
AP Senior English		X		X	X	X
College Prep Senior English		X				

	School A	School 1	School B	School 2	School C	School 3
Business & Technical Writing	x		x	x		x
ESL English Level 1		x				x
ESL English Level 2		x				x
ESL English Level 3		x				
ESL Study Skills		x		x		
Reading Specialist		x	x			
Resource Room Reading		x				
Resource Room English		x				
Pre-Algebra	x		x	x	x	x
Algebra 1	x	x	x	x		x
Honors Geometry	x			x		x
Math Esesentals 1						x
Math Essentials 2						x
Geometry	x	x	x	x	x	x
Statistics			x	x		x
Honors Statistics						x
Algebra 2-Trigonometry	x	x	x	x	x	x
Pre-Calculus	x	x	x	x	x	x

	School A	School 1	School B	School 2	School C	School 3
Honors Algebra 2	x	x				x
Accounting	x		x	x		x
Calculus	x	x	x	x		x
Physical Science	x	x	x	x	x	x
ESL Physical Science		x				
Physical Science in Ag						x
Biology	x	x	x	x	x	x
ESL Biology		x				
Accelerated Biology		x				
Agriscience & Biology						x
AP Biology		x				
Chemistry	x	x	x	x	x	x
Honors Chemistry	x				x	x
Physics	x	x	x	x	x	x
Honors Physics	x					x
Anatomy/ Physiology				x	x	x
Horticulture	x	x	x	x		x
Zoology		x				
Pacific N.W. History	x		x	x	x	x
U.S. History & Gov.	x	x	x	x	x	x
AP U.S. History		x		x		x
ESL U.S. History		x				
Economics		x	x	x	x	x

	School A	School 1	School B	School 2	School C	School 3
World History	x	x	x	x	x	x
Current World Problems	x	x	x	x	x	x
Geography		x		x	x	
ESL Geography		x				
World Geography					x	
Agriscience	x	x	x	x	x	x
Graphic Arts						x
Business	x	x	x	x	x	x
Drafting Tech						x
Electronics	x			x		x
Family & Consumer Studies		x	x	x		x
Welding	x	x	x	x		x
Woodshop	x		x	x		x
Fine Arts	x	x	x	x	x	x
Music	x	x	x	x	x	x
Health & Fitness	x	x	x	x	x	x
Japanese						x
French	x	x		x		x
Spanish	x	x	x	x	x	x

Figure 2. Minimum state and school district graduation requirements.

	State requirements	School A	School 1	School B	School 2	School C	School 3
English	3 credits	4 credits	4 credits	4 credits	4 credits	4 credits	4 credits
Mathematics	2 credits	3 credits	2 credits	2 credits	2 credits	3 credits	2 credits
Science (one must be a lab)	2 credits	2 credits	2 credits	2 credits	2 credits	2 credits	2 credits
Social Science (including U.S. and WA state history)	2.5 credits	3.5 credits	3 credits	3 credits	4 credits	4 credits	2.5 credits
World language (same language)	0 credit	0 credit	0 credit	0 credit	0 credit	0 credit	0 credit
Visual or performing arts	1 credit	1 credit	1 credit	1 credit	1 credit	1 credit	1 credit
Health and fitness	2 credits	2 credits	2.5 credits	2 credits	3 credits	2 credits	2 credits
Occupational Education	1 credit	2 credits	1 credit	3 credits	2 credits	3 credits	1.5 credits
Electives	5.5 credits	8 credits	9.5 credits	10 credits	10 credits	9 credits	7.5 credits
Senior Project	0 credit	1 credit	1 credit	1.5 credits	0 credit	0 credit	.5 credits
Total	19 credits	26.5 credits	26.0 credits	28.5 credits	28 credits	28 credits	23 credits

Figure 3. Minimum state and school requirements for public, four year institutions.

	State requirements	School A	School 1	School B	School 2	School C	School 3
English	4 years	4 years	4 years	4 years	4 years	4 years	4 years
Mathematics	3 years	3 years	3 years	3 years	3 years	3 years	3 years
Science (one must be a lab)	2 years	2 years	2 years	2 years	3 years	3-4 years	2 years
Social Science (including U.S. and WA state history)	3 years	4 years	3 years	3 years	4 years	4 years	3 years
World language (same language)	2 years	2 years	2 years	2 years	2 years	2 years	2 years
Visual or performing arts	1 year	1 years	1 years	1 year	1 year	1 years	1 years

Dear ,

As part of my master's program in professional development in teaching, I am writing on the research paper on reasons some students move from small schools, less than 100 students, to larger neighboring high schools. I will be comparing curriculum, sport offerings, and social activities like clubs, dances, etc.

I am asking for your assistance with comparing curriculums, sport offerings, and social activities in the following areas:

A curriculum packet may include the following:

- classes offered at your school
- credits required for graduation
- other information you might feel helpful

Sports packet information may include the following:

- sports offered
- participation (percentage of enrollment)
- other information you might feel helpful

Social activities may include the following:

- clubs offered
- school events such as dances, other social activities (percentage of enrollment that participate)
- other information you might feel helpful

Thank you for your assistance with this project. If you feel there is additional information that would be beneficial to the completion of this project please feel free to enclose it. It will be much appreciated.

Most sincerely,

Kim Moore
Graduate Student

Audrian E. Huff, PhD
Heritage University

Time of interview: 3:00 p.m.

Date: March 5, 2007

Place: Author's home

Interviewee: Parent A

.Author: What do you think about students moving to larger neighboring high school? Why do you think they moved?

Parent A: I have varying feelings about that, but mostly I have really negative and really resentful feeling about it. Because I guess if I thought a student was moving truly for a reason we didn't have, like if you had some really artistic student we don't provide that. If they were moving because we did not and could not offer a curriculum for them I would probably say well okay. Like if you had a computer wiz kid, if you had a computer wiz kid we don't provide that. To me the kids I've seen move over there because of sports they move because...there's not one kid I can think of that needs to go because they need a four year scholarship to college...there's not one kid I can think that's happened with that has moved out of our school district. They're moving for sports, they're moving for social status which that's not part of school...that's not what it's designed to do and I think we provide all of those adequately but not just adequately but better than a lot of places can. I'm not going to name kids on your tape. But I can name kids who have gone over there and have ended up pregnant, on drugs, grade check problems we've never had it here. And it hurts our school! We have the potential to loose an entire school district because of them moving out. So it just creates a lot of resentful feelings for me.

Author: What does your student's class schedule consist of?

Parent A: Science, sometimes Student A has two and sometimes the classes are honors classes in almost anything. Honors is not offered in physical science because the teachers doesn't feel it's challenging enough. And honors isn't offered in Geometry. But you can take honors in History, Science, Math. For instance student A last year had two Science Honors classes, Accounting, Math, Computer Apps which is Works, Word those kind of things. English classes there is two sets of English classes now. One traditional English and one for kids who have a tougher time reading and writing, more of a remedial. They've taken band. They (student A's sister) each take two different shop classes. They both take Spanish and both are fluent enough in Spanish at this point to start Spanish 3.

Author: How do you feel about the classes that are offered and do you feel the students are prepared for college?

Parent A: Hands down no doubt. I don't even have an issue with that. I mean I can see that from my own experience with college I can see where I was at the same time. Their standardized test scores, they don't just pass them they blow the top off of them. And I don't necessarily think my kids are brilliant they do apply themselves and they have home help. The education is there if the kid wants it. No are they only prepared I think they are way beyond prepared. Because of the individualize instruction they get and the ability. For instance the Spanish kids, a freshman student has finished their second year of Spanish already. They're looking at offering a third year. The teachers offer things outside of regular class time. Now with student A we're looking at...she has some empty class slots that can't be filled, we don't have anything to offer her. I just talked to a two year college and she can take things through there. So ya, I don't

think they're prepared they think they're beyond prepared. The only thing I think they lack as not being prepared, is the ability to believe they're prepared.

Author: Does student A play sports? If yes, which ones?

Parent A: Basketball, volleyball, and softball.

Time of interview: 3:20 p.m.

Date: March 5, 2007

Place: Author's home

Interviewee: Student 1

Author: What do you think about students moving to larger neighboring high school? Why do you think they moved?

Student 1: I personally don't think it's very good because our community is small enough as it is. Going somewhere else just kind of kills it for sports and things. When the numbers are down there isn't as many people to hang out with. But don't really see any point really in going anywhere else especially in the neighboring high school because it's so big and their class sizes are so big and some of the kids just kind of get lost in the system and kids that don't know really what they're suppose to be learning. But here you have a lot of help and stuff if you don't get something you get a lot of help.

Author: Why do you think they move?

Student 1: A lot of them said it was because of better school and more classes but the people that moved you know that's not it. The ones that moved did it because there was more people, there were more dances, more sports they wanted to go to State in a sport or something, so the easy way to do that.

Author: What does your student's class schedule consist of?

Student 1: This year I'm taking Ag Construction, English 3, Physics, Contemporary World Problems, Careers', Spanish 2 and Algebra 2.

Author: How do you feel about the classes that are offered and do you feel the students are prepared for college?

Student 1: Ya, the classes here...the range of classes to choose from is limited but nothing...everything is offered and it's taught well if you're willing to apply yourself. If you're going into a class and not doing your homework

and complain about the teacher then that's not exactly fair. But the classes that are here offered here are taught well and I feel prepared for college I got a 190 or something on my pre SAT my freshman year so I know I was taught what I need to know.

Author: Do you play sports? If yes, which ones?

Student 1: I play volleyball and basketball.

Time of interview: 6:10 p.m.

Date: March 5, 2007

Place: Parent B home

Interviewee: Parent B

Author: Why did Student 2 move from a small high school to a larger neighboring high school?

Parent B: Because she wanted to have more opportunities to...more class opportunities. The student had more opportunities to do extracurricular activities. To get student 2 prepared for college.

Author: What does your student's class schedule consist of?

Parent B: I know the student takes Pre-Calculus , Honors English, Spanish 2, Chemistry, Weight Training and Physics.

Author: How do you feel about the classes that are offered and do you feel the students are prepared for college?

Parent B: I actually have been very impressed with the classes over there and yes they have helped prepare the student for college.

Author: Does student 2 play sports? If yes, which ones?

Parent B: Volleyball, basketball, and softball.

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Time of interview: 6:00 p.m.

Date: March 5, 2007

Place: Student 2 home

Interviewee: Student 2

Author: What do you think about students moving to the neighboring high school? Why do you think they moved?

Student 2: I moved because there was more opportunities for me in sports, academic, and just social. Because academically there is more to choose from that helps me for my career in the future. Sports you don't have to worry about if there is going to be a team or not and choose any sport you want to play.

Author: What does your class schedule consist of?

Student 2: Right now I'm taking Spanish 2, Weight training, Chemistry, U.S. History, Honors English, Pre-Calculus and Accounting.

Author: How do you feel about the classes that are offered and do you feel the students are prepared for college?

Student 2: They're definitely preparing me for college. I feel I was getting a good education at both high schools.

Author: Do you play sports? If yes, which ones?

Student 2: Volleyball, Basketball, and softball.

Time of interview: 4:40 p.m.

Date: March 6, 2007

Place: Author's home

Interviewee: Parent C

Author: What do you think about students moving to the larger neighboring high school?

Parent C: I think it's fine. If they want to do that it's fine. That's up to the family.

Author: Why do you think they moved?

Parent C: The kids I know have moved for social reasons. Because they were looking for broader friendship opportunities and for the most part I think that's the main reason.

Author: What does student's class schedule consist of?

Parent C: Band, basic math, Algebra 1, English, Biology, World History

Author: How do you feel about the classes that are offered and do you feel the students are prepared for college?

Parent C: Ya, I think so...in some areas kids kind of have to have the incentive to pursue it, like if they want to take Calculus, the upper level math classes. They will have to have the personal incentive to do an independent study on that with the teachers help. I think it's available but it takes that special student.

Author: Does student 3 play sports? If yes, which ones?

Parent C: Well the student doesn't now. The student did play volleyball basketball and competed in track. The student would be doing track but the student is taking Driver's Ed instead.

Time of interview: 3:35 p.m.

Date: March 6, 2007

Place: Student 3 home

Interviewee: Student 3

Author: What do you think about students moving to the neighboring high school?

Student 3: Personally I kind of think more power to them. Well they seem to enjoy it so I guess that works. There's lot more opportunities and more people. I'm a people person and it bores me seeing the same people over and over again.

Author: Why do you think they moved?

Student 3: Well I guess maybe sometimes it's not because they want to move it's that they have to but it turns out to be a good thing. What I've heard from a lot of the kids who have moved, they've love it. They think it's more fun. At small schools sometimes you're pressured to be playing sports and activities and such. When you go to a big school there're too many kids and you're probably, just no chance of you making a team anyways.

Author: What does your class schedule consist of?

Student 3: I am taking ummm...band and the required stuff like math, Algebra 1, and another little math class that I thought I needed but I guess I don't and I still taking it anyway. Just boring old English and History.

Author: Do you play sports? If yes, which ones?

Student 3: Not playing any sports this year and I'm not missing it at all. I'm just not a sports person. I like playing music and dancing better it's a different kind of sport.

Time of interview: 5:35 p.m.

Date: March 6, 2007

Place: Author's home

Interviewee: Parent D

Author: Why did Student 4 move from a small high school to a larger neighboring high school?

Parent D: Because they were repeating the same classes my student already had. I went in and talked to the school and tried getting the student into some other classes because the student has taken the same classes year after year and they wouldn't accommodate my student. They wouldn't offer anything else or sticking my student into a class with one or two other students to teach her something different than the same class the student had taken two other times. That was pretty much the line, when we decided to transfer to the other school.

Author: What does your student's class schedule consist of?

Parent D: The student enjoyed math, so the student took a lot of math classes. The student also took art, floriculture, and basic English.

Author: How do you feel about the classes that are offered and do you feel students are prepared for college?

Parent D: Yes, I do. At the larger neighboring high school the student opened up more and took more pride in class work because the student understood more of what was going on and what was expected. Instead of just having the material handed out, the student was explained more about what everything was. The student just opened up in school work and blossomed with taking pride in the schoolwork.

Author: Does student 3 play sports? If yes, which ones?

Parent D: Yes, volleyball.

Time of interview: 5:50 p.m.

Date: March 6, 2007

Place: Author's home

Interviewee: Student 4

Author: What do you think about students moving to the neighboring high school?

Student 4: The neighboring high was a lot bigger school with more classes, a lot more people, better sports program. I got tired of the same old thing at my old high school, same classes, and same old people. I got tired of being around the same people all the time.

Author: What does your class schedule consist of?

Student 4: P.E., Art, Math, Horticulture, Floriculture, English, and Spanish 1.

Author: How do you feel about the classes that are offered and do you feel the students are prepared for college?

Student 4: Oh ya, they help you out a lot better. They explain things a lot more. The material over all is more advanced and felt more like a college setting at the high school.

Author: Do you play sports? If yes, which ones?

Student 4: Volleyball