

News Notes

by Robert C. McKean and Bob L. Taylor

School District Consolidation— A Reappraisal

According to a report of the National Institute of Education, the two basic arguments for school consolidation—economy and better education—are not true. The savings in costs are often canceled out by:

1. The cost of transporting more students over more miles in more buses that are driven by more drivers who are covered by more insurance

2. The cost of storing and distributing supplies bought by a central district office

3. The higher salaries expected by more highly prepared teachers who are attracted to the bigger school districts

4. Even cuts in administrative costs may not be real—consider the time, attention, and leadership the superintendent in a one-town school district of three hundred pupils can devote to each of the groups and individuals whom he serves with the service provided by a superintendent in charge of a 12,000 student district spread over fifty townships.

Also, the quality of education has not necessarily improved. Even James Conant's initial study of 25 high schools, which gave the impetus to the rural consolidation movement, cited two small schools that by Conant's criteria were doing a superior job. Research shows that bigger schools do not result in higher achieving students nor do these students do better in college.

The study was done by Jonathan P. Sher (Education Director of the Center for Community Change) and Rachel B. Tompkins (Citizens' Council for Ohio Schools). The investigators concluded that educators should take another look at the economies small schools and small school districts can offer, together with their advantages. Copies of the report, *Economy, Efficiency, and Equality*, are available from School Finance and Organization Division, National Institute of Education, Washington, D.C. 20208.

Preschool Education Pays in Long Run

Low income children with preschool education are better able to keep up in regular school than their counterparts who did not attend preschool. This was the finding of a study done by Dr Irving Lazar of Cornell University who coordinated the Developmental Continuity Consortium, which pooled and analyzed data from 12 projects which were funded to find their original preschool children and see what the long term effects were. The investigation included Head Start and other preschool children up to 10 years after they had left preschool. The 12 studies looked at center-based programs, home-based programs, and combinations. They were mostly in the eastern half of the United States in both rural and urban areas that utilized a variety of preschool curricula. Over 1,600 children were tested before and after preschool in the 12 investigations.

The study found that the children were significantly less likely to need special education or to be kept back in grade than other children from identical backgrounds. For information, contact Irving Lazar, Chairman, Community Service Education, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York 14853.

Amnesty Week Nets 3,000 Books

During the week of May 16-20, 1977, a Canadian county school system received back nearly 3,000 texts and library books during a week of amnesty from fines and penalties. Since the books were a mixture of hard cover and paperbacks, some from elementary and some from secondary schools, an accurate pricing was not possible. Nevertheless, using an average price of \$5.00 per book, the school district easily had returned \$15,000 worth of school instructional materials.

Some schools sent home flyers, put announcements in the school newsletters, and/or announced it daily over the school public address system. These promotional efforts resulted in a greater return of materials. Savings of this magnitude are certainly worth the effort on the part of the school administration.

Cafe Harbor View: Part of the Curriculum

Cafe Harbor is a cafe in Hawaii catering to an exclusive cli-

entele. According to *Na Lono Kula*, published by the Department of Education in the State of Hawaii, this is one of two pilot programs aimed at reducing the noise level in cafeterias. Pearl Harbor Kai's Vice Principal Edith Lee and her husband Richard, principal of Red Hill Elementary School, developed a plan to set aside cafe areas in the regular cafeteria with circular tables seating four or five students, with plants and greenery, with special place mats, and with Student Council representatives serving students privileged to dine there.

To get a reservation for this exclusive area, a class must be chosen by the lunch supervisors, who are mothers and are sensitive to yelling as the best behaved and quietest class the previous day in the cafeteria. Rules are simple. "The class must line up nicely with no pushing, shoving, wrestling, pinching, or general mauling. They must pick up their trays without dropping them. They must eat their lunch with moderate-level conversation, and then empty their trays without undue banging or throwing of food."

In Pearl Harbor Kai's Cafe Harbor View and Red Hill's Cafe Raider, things are remarkably quiet and peaceful—surprisingly so in the midst of hundreds of elementary school children.

National Assessment: Australian Style

Australia recently completed a national assessment of reading, writing, and arithmetic abilities of 10- and 14-year-olds in more than 600 schools. Around 7,000 children were in the sample for each age level. Aimed at determining the competency in "literacy and numeracy," the assessment found that in reading skills there was no significant difference in performance levels in comparison with comparable students from either Great Britain or the United States.

Nevertheless, deficiencies were found in writing abilities. A major-

ity of both the 10- and 14-year-olds were competent in simple writing situations, but in some specific writing tasks such as the writing of a formal letter of application for jobs, the students were deficient. In arithmetic skills, 90 percent of the 10-year-olds were able to do simple calculations with whole numbers on tasks that were particularly relevant and useful in everyday life. However, large numbers of the 14-year-olds were not able to do simple calculations, and an even lower level of achievement was recorded for the older students in the more complex mathematics problems.

Taxidermy Class in Junior High School

"Taxidermy is a lot more than just stuffing animals," says Sam Blake, a science teacher in Miller Junior High School, Aberdeen, Washington. In an article in *Your Public Schools*, published by the Washington State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Blake indicates that one of the class goals is to increase the student's awareness of the environment and the creatures man must share it with. "Most kids, even in the Grays Harbor area, don't have firsthand knowledge of wild animals."

Most of the specimens they use are animals donated by wildlife groups such as the State Game Department. They include such things as birds that die in oil spills, animals hit on roadways, and illegally killed game that has been confiscated. "We are really salvaging wildlife in this class rather than wasting it," Blake says. After the animals leave the taxidermy class, many are sent to elementary classrooms in nearby districts.

Sam Blake learned taxidermy while working in a museum during college. Last year, he decided to give some informal workshops, and these proved so popular that he was asked to offer the course as a regular elective in the junior high school. This year, a second class was offered. Facilities for the instruction came through the use of the school's

old, abandoned cafeteria. A part of the kitchen was walled off to make a workshop, an old freezer, refrigerator, and the necessary tools were secured. Space was provided for projects to be left in place without being disturbed from class to class.

The class isn't limited to just boys, of course. Blake says that girls taking the class "seem to have a better touch. They are a little squeamish the first couple of days, but after that they're really good."

Will the Magnet School Concept Save Public Education?

Both Mario Fantini, Dean of Education, University of Massachusetts, and John Glenn, U.S. Senator, D-Ohio, think that it might. The courts are accepting the magnet school program as an approach to the court-ordered busing problem. While 60 percent of the students seem to be satisfied with the traditional school program, the magnet school concept presents the opportunity to introduce a quality educational program for students needing it while bringing students together into racially integrated learning situations.

Glenn has been supporting the appropriation of Congressional money to develop the magnet concept and the alternative school concept. Also, it is hoped that the approach will aid with the problem of the renewal and stabilization of the stagnant inner cities. Some of the possible pitfalls identified in the plan are: putting new labels on old programs, taking the most able students and teachers away leaving the school system as a one-race and under-resourced operation, and putting too many magnet schools in a given area so as to dilute the effectiveness of the magnet schools to attract racially diverse student bodies.

Advocates of the plan do not claim that it will solve the segregation question alone. They argue, however, that if properly supported by the community, the plan will help to bring about racial and socioeconomic balances in school districts. The Dallas School Dis-

trict claims that the concept has been successful in its desegregation efforts.

Fourth Graders Study Traffic Safety

Fourth graders in Arizona study bicycle and pedestrian safety as part of a traffic safety program called "The Safest Show on Earth." This curriculum utilizes kits that are issued to the participating schools. Each kit includes audiovisual materials, a teacher's manual, a "Big Top" foldout display, storyboards, concept pictures, safety ranger decals, certificates, and posters.

Students use these items to produce artwork that depicts traffic safety concepts and techniques. A film company then transfers these into a full-color filmstrip. The filmstrip, including professional graphics and a prerecorded cassette tape, is coordinated and cued through a storyboard sequence into a final product. The finished work is returned to the school of its origin.

The traffic safety program has been praised for its stimulation of student creativity and promotion of traffic safety. The films are reinforcing in that pupils can see their rough ideas and artwork fashioned into an orderly, finished product.

Information about "The Safest Show on Earth" is available from Bob Hall, Program Specialist, Arizona Department of Education, 1535 West Jefferson, Phoenix, Arizona 85007.

Students Like "Word" Course

Vocabulary training is stressed in a popular new course at Lisbon High School, Lisbon Falls, Maine. Merton Ricker, head of the English department, developed the program and serves as instructor. He is quoted as stating, "The kids are really turned on. They have an insatiable curiosity to learn new words."

This is a nine-week elective course for juniors and seniors. The class stresses student participation.

Pupils have the option of developing their own list of words to learn each week or having a word list assigned to them. They may take their own words from any source they wish—newspapers, magazines, television, words from conversation, or from other courses at the school. If they decide to learn their weekly word quota from an assigned list, Ricker has an abundant supply of them.

Lists of words were developed by teachers in other academic areas and turned over to Ricker. The results are that students are studying vocabulary in content areas to a much greater degree than previously. Since teachers frequently do not place enough emphasis on learning vocabulary, the course has had a positive impact on other courses according to student and teacher feedback.

Objective English Test Predicts College English Placement

Research evidence has demonstrated that student performance on the multiple-choice test, the *Test of Standard Written English*, is related to performance on brief essays. The predictive capabilities of the objective test have been found to be as good as the predictive capabilities of brief samples of student writing. Of course, the objective test does not require the faculty time to evaluate as do large numbers of freshman essays.

The *Test of Standard Written English* is a 30-minute, multiple-choice test of writing skills for use in college placement, and it is now in its third year of experimental use. The test has been used with over three million students. Educational Testing Service conducted a special research project to study the use and effectiveness of the test. The indirect measure of writing ability (objective test) was compared with the direct measures of writing ability (essays) to develop other measures of instructional outcomes beyond course grades, to determine whether students experience gain in the abilities measured by the place-

ment test, and to serve a variety of institutions' concerns with respect to the utility of the test for placement purposes.

The study obtained samples of students' writing at three points during the freshman year—essays administered at the beginning of the freshman English course, at the end, and a post-essay test. These measures, in addition to students' course grades and perceptions of their satisfaction with their English courses and their placement in them, provided the criteria for measuring instructional outcomes. It was found that:

1. Student performance on multiple-choice tests of writing ability had a strong relationship to student performance on essay tests.

2. A brief multiple-choice test of writing ability predicted actual writing performance during the freshman year as well as a brief essay test.

3. Both the *Test of Standard Written English* and the SAT contributed more to the prediction of freshman writing performance than either high school English grades or high school rank.

4. The *Test of Standard Written English* proved to be more useful in placing students in college English composition courses than the SAT, but a combination of the two scores predicted student writing performance better than either test score alone.

A copy of the report, *A Study of College English Placement and the Test of Standard Written English*, may be ordered from Hunter M. Breland, Educational Testing Service, Princeton, New Jersey 08540.

Veneral Disease Education

To meet the demands of recent legislation requiring veneral disease education in Ohio, the State Department of Education is distributing a teacher's resource guide to all school districts. The law requires the study of veneral disease during the study of health unless the par-

ents of a student request in writing that the student be excused.

Georgia Adds Lay Citizens to Textbook Review Process

Individual school districts choose the textbooks that they wish to use, but the State Board of Education first approves the list from which books may be purchased with state funds. Of course, school systems may use local funds to order books not on the state-approved list. In order to review the books and instructional materials, the state board each year appoints a Textbook Advisory Committee. According to Eleanor Gilmer, writing in *Georgia Alert*, published by the Georgia Department of Education, a new policy emphasizes lay participation for the first time.

The Textbook Advisory Committee is made up of 12 professional members—one from each congressional district and two from the state-at-large. "This year three non-voting lay members were added to the committee. (State law stipulates that only professional educators may serve as voting members of the textbook committee.)"

B. J. McClendon, a school principal from Fort Valley, is chairman of the committee this year. He praised the new process saying, "The lay members were treated like any other members. They participated in all discussions. The only difference was they didn't have an official vote. However, their opin-

ions were asked for and were taken into consideration by the professional members."

Doctoral Education: A Mandated Consortium in Louisiana

In the Fall of 1976, the Louisiana Board of Regents for Higher Education employed three consultants to review doctoral programs in education in the state. As a result of this review, two programs were eliminated, and the remaining three programs were required to proceed immediately to "form a single, interdependent program of high quality." The three universities involved in this consortium were Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Northwestern State University, and the University of New Orleans.

After a year of study, the member institutions have developed a detailed proposal now being considered by the Board of Regents. This proposal includes:

1. *An Executive Committee* composed of graduate faculty members and the Deans of the Colleges of Education. The committee will act on all matters of planning, policy, development, and administration relating to doctoral studies in education.

2. *Program Review*—Institutions will be requested to propose programs for which they would like to be the degree-granting institutional member within the consor-

tium. Criteria by which the proposals will be evaluated will include staff, facilities, library resources, and institutional scope and mission.

3. *Catalogue Commonalities*—There will be an attempt to coordinate and standardize catalogue entries as much as possible.

4. *Common Admission Policies* in relation to GRE score that will require the student to be in the upper half of the population norm; satisfactory competencies in written and oral communications and professional experience.

5. *Cooperative Endeavors* to enhance the quality of the doctoral experience by providing joint faculty appointments, internships, lecture series, in-service programs to school districts, joint research, and other activities.

A major consideration of those involved in the study has been the distance between schools, which varies from 80 to 260 miles. With this in mind, scheduling of joint ventures will be a critical matter. Also, a variety of qualitative safeguards were built into the proposal to assure the highest quality possible. Items such as faculty and program review criteria and procedures were specified. It is hoped that these items will meet the demands of the Board of Regents.

Copies of the entire consortium document can be obtained by sending \$3.00 to Dr. Robert A. Alost, Dean of Education, Northwestern State University, Natchitoches, Louisiana. [E]

Index to Advertisers

Educational Testing Service	204
Harper & Row, Inc.	218
Instructo/McGraw-Hill	177
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