

Research Topic: School Size

Table of Contents

Dollars & Sense II: Lessons from Good, Cost-Effective Small Schools	2
Lessons on Assessing the Costs of Small High Schools: Evidence from Seattle and Denver	2
Legal Issues and Small High Schools: Strategies to Support Innovation in Washington State	3
Lessons on Assessing the Costs of Small Schools: Evidence from Denver	3
Planning Resources for Teachers in Small High Schools	3
The Small Schools Project, Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington	3
2004	3
An Early Report on Comprehensive High School Conversions	4
The Small Schools Project, Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington	4
High Schools on a Human Scale: How Small Schools Can Transform American Education	4
Converting a Comprehensive High School into Small Learning Communities: A Case Study of Mountlake Terrace High School	4
Redesigning Schools: What Matters and What Works	5
Sizing Things Up: What Parents, Teachers and Students Think About Large and Small High Schools	5

Dollars & Sense II: Lessons from Good, Cost-Effective Small Schools

Barbara Kent Lawrence et al. Knowledge Works Foundation, Concordia, and Architects of Achievement.

2005

<http://www.goodsmallschools.org/>

The study analyzes budgets, facilities, educational program, and academic achievement of 25 small schools across the nation with diverse populations and approaches. The study finds that on average, these small schools spent 17 percent less per student than comparable schools in their districts while achieving equivalent or better educational results. In addition to operational costs, an analysis of more than 3,000 school construction projects revealed that smaller schools are not more expensive to build than larger, reasonably sized schools. The report also includes the following resources: case studies of 17 select small schools, contact, demographic, budget, and facilities information by school; a school facility construction analysis summary; school test scores; a cost-savings strategies grid; criteria for selecting and evaluating schools; and selected references. A companion Web site provides a searchable online version of the book and original, in-depth school site visit reports.

Lessons on Assessing the Costs of Small High Schools: Evidence from Seattle and Denver

Marguerite Roza, Claudine Swartz, and Larry Miller

Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington

Policy Brief, March 2005

http://www.crpe.org/hot/PDF/CostofSmSchool_brief.pdf

This four-page policy brief presents findings from a study that compared the costs of small high schools—those with fewer than 500 students—to large high schools in Seattle and Denver. The researchers examined all costs associated with educational services— school budgets, staff salaries, and central budgets— and found that although some of the most expensive high schools are the smallest, some of the least expensive high schools are also small. For example, Seattle's least expensive high school is a small school that costs 13 percent less than the district average. The researchers recommend that school and district leaders concerned about the costs of small schools should: 1) look beyond school budget totals and examine all school costs to get the “full cost” picture; 2) consider the costs of alternative options; and 3) evaluate whether spending differences between small and large schools are strategic and/or based on student need. The researchers conclude that with careful and creative budgeting practices, small schools can offer an affordable and at times, less expensive option than large schools.

The Julia Richman Education Complex: The JREC Story

NCREST, School Redesign Network at Stanford University, and JREC's Urban Academy

January 2004

Ordering information is available at <http://www.schoolredesign.net/srn/server.php?idx=924>

This collection of resources provides information on the conversion of New York's Julia Richman High School, a large, academically failing comprehensive high school, into the Julia Richman Education Complex (JREC), a campus of six small schools that is described by Tom Vander Ark as “the best example in the United States of a multiplex.” Resources include a case study, DVD, and cards of “Frequently Asked Questions” to JREC educators about creating and sustaining an education complex. These materials examine things such as the concept of an education complex, JREC's design features and practices, sustainability challenges, and lessons learned on how to create a model high school.

Legal Issues and Small High Schools: Strategies to Support Innovation in Washington State

Kelly Warner-King and Mitch Price

Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington

July 2004

<http://www.smallschoolsproject.org/index.asp?siteloc=start§ion=legal-intro>

This guide provides information on legal and policy issues for people involved in creating small high schools in Washington state. It examines the potential legal and regulatory problems that small school reformers may confront and demonstrates how they can work within the present legal and regulatory system to achieve their goals. It concludes with a discussion about what changes can be made to state laws to assist in the creation of small schools.

Lessons on Assessing the Costs of Small Schools: Evidence from Denver

Marguerite Roza and Claudine Swartz

Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington

September 2004

<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/NR/downloads/ed/resourcesresearch/Lessonsonassessingcostsm.pdf>

This research brief presents findings and lessons learned from a study of the costs of small schools compared to large schools in the Denver Public Schools system. While most cost comparisons have relied on school budget figures, the authors of this study argue that an accurate “full picture” of school funding requires examination of several cost components: 1) school budgets, 2) staff salaries, and 3) central budget. The analysis found that smaller schools did have higher per pupil school budgets, but there was no significant link between school size and salary expenditures. In some cases, the higher small schools costs were inflated by special program costs. Some large schools had per pupil costs that were higher than the district average. The authors present Cincinnati as a budget reform model for districts interested in creating small schools. There, for example, the district has removed fixed school costs to eliminate some of the economies of scale associated with large schools.

Planning Resources for Teachers in Small High Schools

The Small Schools Project, Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington
2004

<http://www.smallschoolsproject.org/index.asp?siteloc=resource§ion=plan>

Planning Resources for Teachers in Small High Schools provides small school leaders and teachers with a collection of resources to help them re-think their teaching and learning practices. The four collections of resources are based on extensive research, as well as interviews with teachers and site visits to schools across the country. Resource collections include sample lesson plans, recommended readings, school profiles, professional development sources, and planning guides. Each resource collection focuses on a different set of topics. For example, the spring 2003 collection covers such topics as project-based learning, literacy, and college access, while the winter 2004 collection covers such topics as family and community connections, school culture, and discipline.

An Early Report on Comprehensive High School Conversions

Catherine A. Wallach with Richard Lear

The Small Schools Project, Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington

March 2003

Executive summary: http://www.smallschoolsproject.org/PDFS/wallach_exec.pdf

Full report: <http://www.smallschoolsproject.org/PDFS/Wallach.pdf>

This report describes the early stages of the conversion of three large Washington state high schools into several small learning communities. Each of these schools received a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation under one of three different programs: the Washington State Achievers Program, the Model School Initiative, and the Model District Initiative. The report offers insights and recommendations to other schools in the early stages of conversion, such as having strong principal leadership, using data to make the case for change, making the process inclusive and transparent, and balancing structural and teaching issues.

High Schools on a Human Scale: How Small Schools Can Transform American Education

Thomas Toch

Beacon Press

2003

Information on how to order this book is available at <http://www.beacon.org/sp03cat/toch.html>

This book profiles five different small schools in order to show how these personalized learning communities can improve student achievement and provide students with a safe environment in which to learn. By offering an inside look at schools in such diverse places as New York, San Diego, Providence, and Henderson, Minnesota, the author demonstrates how small schools can achieve impressive results in a variety of ways, under very different circumstances.

Converting a Comprehensive High School into Small Learning Communities: A Case Study of Mountlake Terrace High School

Catherine A. Wallach

The Small Schools Project, Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington,

2002

Executive summary: http://www.smallschoolsproject.org/PDFS/conver_exec.pdf

Full report: http://www.smallschoolsproject.org/PDFS/Final_DP.pdf

This case study documents the first two years of the conversion of Mountlake Terrace High School, a large school located in Edmonds, Washington, into several small learning communities. By examining the challenges faced by the school, this report is able to provide recommendations to others who are about to embark on the conversion process. The report finds that all stakeholders must share in the decision-making process; the entire community must be engaged in the conversion, from parents and students to district leaders; and staff must be educated about the characteristics and benefits of small schools.

Redesigning Schools: What Matters and What Works

Linda Darling-Hammond

School Redesign Network at Stanford University

2002

<http://www.schoolredesign.net/srn/binary/SchoolsBook.pdf>

This report describes the 10 features of effective small schools: personalization, continuous relationships, high standards and performance-based assessment, authentic curriculum, adaptive pedagogy, multicultural and anti-racist teaching, knowledgeable and skilled teachers, collaborative planning and professional development, family and community connections, and democratic decision making. The report explains each feature in detail, and includes examples of schools that are successfully implementing these features.

Sizing Things Up: What Parents, Teachers and Students Think About Large and Small High Schools

Jean Johnson, Ann Duffett, Steve Farkas, and Kathleen Collins

Public Agenda

2002

http://www.publicagenda.org/research/research_reports_details.cfm?list=21

This report presents the opinions of teachers, students, and parents regarding the issue of school size. It is based on three national surveys of randomly selected respondents from all over the country, and is the most detailed study to date of public attitudes about this issue. Parents of children in small schools tended to be happier with their school regarding social issues and academic achievement than parents of children in large schools. While teachers in large schools complained more about overcrowding and academic standards than teachers in small schools, both expressed similar concerns in a number of areas, including poor student achievement and low morale among teachers. Students in all types of schools were generally happy with their school, but also cited problems such as substances abuse, bullying, and cheating. Overall, respondents recognized many of the advantages of small schools, but less than half showed real support for the idea of breaking up large schools. The report concludes that as of 2002, other types of reforms may be eclipsing the importance of school size, such as class size.