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Program sharing and its effect on Iowa schools

Abstract
In the late 1970’s many communities began to feel the effects of declining enrollment in their school populations. Today, many school districts are closing their elementary schools and have reduced the number of elementary teachers, as financial constraints become more stringent other school districts will also be forced to look at alternatives. Few of these communities, however, have planned ahead for the high school enrollment decline which will arrive as smaller classes in elementary grades move on through the school system.

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PROGRAM SHARING
AND
IT'S EFFECT ON IOWA SCHOOLS

A Research Paper
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In the late 1970's many communities began to feel the effects of declining enrollment in their school populations. Today, many school districts are closing their elementary schools and have reduced the number of elementary teachers; as financial constraints become more stringent other school districts will also be forced to look at alternatives. Few of these communities, however, have planned ahead for the high school enrollment decline which will arrive as smaller classes in elementary grades move on through the school system.

Bussard (1981) found that it was of the utmost importance that communities plan for change in the school enrollment. Because of the specialization of the teaching staff, planning for the high school is more complex than the elementary school. There is unique urgency for special planning in school districts with a single high school, a category that includes roughly three out of four school districts in the United States.

Bussard (1981) pointed out that not all school districts are experiencing decline in the
high school. There is wide variation at the national and regional levels. National figures record the peak year of public school enrollment, grades 9 through 12, as 1976. A 25% decrease from that peak is projected for 1989. For the regions that have declining enrollment (especially the Northeast and North-Central regions of the United States) the numbers might range as high as 20 to 40%.

This degree of decline will change the high school. In the near future, school districts with one high school will not be able to offer the programs they do now (Bussard 1981).

School districts with several elementary schools, but only one high school do not have the option of closing and consolidating their secondary school as they do at the elementary level. Yet, declining enrollment in secondary schools requires fundamental reassessment of the purpose of the high school and the role of the high school in the community.

While the implications of decline and change may be different for large and small districts, the fears and the overriding issues are common.
People in a district whose high school has a population of 2,000 can project a loss of 500 to 1,000 students. They will be just as baffled as those whose enrollment will drop from 1,000 to 700 or 500 to 350 (Bussard 1981).

Many strategies and approaches are open to districts in making the high school fill the role that the community wants it to, with fewer students. Some of these strategies might range from changing programs and staff structure and scheduling practices, to sharing programs with other school districts, colleges, and/or community organizations.

Today, the possibilities for sharing with other school districts are many and varied. Cooperation between schools which are candidates for consolidation is more likely to preserve or improve programs which might otherwise be jeopardized by low enrollment (Kanack & Prior 1982).

Inter-district sharing is viewed by many as a solution to the problems caused by declining enrollment and decreasing revenues. As one superintendent phrased it, (Stinard 1983),
"Sharing is a means to enable us to offer a comprehensive educational programs, even if we can't have a comprehensive school".

Writings on inter-district sharing are limited. In March 1982, for example, the Institute for Responsive Education published A Review of the Literature and Annotated Bibliography on Managing Decline in School Systems as an effort "to provide theoretical and practical help to school managers and policy makers as they faced a condition of declining resources, enrollment, and political support" (Stinard 1983). In a unique table entitled, "A Compendium of Advice to School Managers as They Adjust to Decline", only two of the forty-two documents addressed inter-district sharing. (Siegmund 1981)

The idea of inter-district sharing was first introduced into the state of Iowa in 1979. Under the auspices of school law 280.15, any two or more public school districts may jointly employ and share the services of any school personnel, or acquire and share the use of classrooms, laboratories, equipment and facilities. Any classes made available to students in this manner
shall be considered as complying with the requirements of section 257.1 relating to the maintenance of the twelve grades of a school. (Buehner 1987)

The amount of sharing occurring among districts is difficult to monitor. In a survey taken in 1982, Stinard (1983) assessed a seven-county area in East Central Iowa. Data showed that the percentages of districts sharing at least one program for the 1979-80, 1980-81, 1981-82, and 1982-83 school years were 23%, 28%, 49%, and 49%, respectively.

Sharing strategies can be very different, some might pool students in a single location, move teachers or administrators among schools, bring specialized facilities or equipment to schools on a rotating basis, or bring students and teachers together across large distances through technological communication links (Siegmund 1981). These co-operative ventures are utilized in varying degrees according to a particular school's need. That need can range from the sharing of a single course or activity to a more extensive program where one school sends all the students
from one or more grade levels to another district for all or a large portion of the educational program. This allows the schools to maintain their identity with their own school boards or sports programs (Martin 1987).

According to Powell (1982) and Siegmund (1986) there are many questions which should be asked when deciding if a school district should become involved in a sharing program. Some of these questions might be: (1) Do the teachers need an opportunity to learn new teaching methods? (2) Would the school like to offer more vocational experiences for students? (3) Does the school need qualified counselors or specialists? (4) Is the school unable to offer students the opportunity to take two or three years of science, math, foreign language, or English? (5) Is the school capable of offering special programs for the gifted and handicapped students? Where the response to any of these questions is "yes", sharing services might be the answer.
EXAMPLES OF SHARING

As stated by Stinard (1983) sharing can take many different forms. The following are examples which are used extensively, especially in Iowa.

1) Administrative Sharing: Two or more districts share a superintendent or principal. This example can be found in the Riceville/Saint Ansgar coop program.

2) Sharing Teachers: Two or more districts share a teacher or teachers. The teacher or students would travel between the districts. An example of teacher sharing can be found in the Nashua/Plainfield coop program. Where vocational agriculture students from Plainfield and business education students from Nashua are bused to different schools respectively for classes.

3) Sharing Facilities: Two or more districts share one set of facilities, either on an alternating basis or at the same time. For example the Corwith-Wesley/LuVerne coop program. In this sharing program all 10, 11, and 12th grade students from Corwith-Wesley and LuVerne attend school in the Corwith building. While all 7, 8, and
9th grade students from Corwith-Wesley and LuVerne attend school in LuVerne.

4) Activities Sharing: Two or more school districts combine their student bodies to field athletic teams, full bands, or offer activities which might not otherwise be offered.

5) Satellite Technology Sharing: Two or more districts would share curricular offerings using satellite communications. This type of sharing is sometimes referred to as two-way interactive instruction. This allows several users the opportunity to speak or answer questions whenever a response is needed. The Dumont School District is presently hooked up to this type of satellite program.

ESTABLISHING THE SHARED PROGRAM

With the recent publication of possible educational standards issued by the Department of Public instruction, many smaller school districts should look at the possibility of sharing. In doing so they should weigh the advantages and disadvantages. Some of these advantages according to (Clegg, 1987, Meier, 1987, Messerli, 1987, Olson, 1987, Powell, 1982, Ringold, 1987,
Sorensen, 1987, Stinard, 1987, Wagner, 1987) were identified as follows.

Advantages: It will...
1. Help maintain quality teachers
2. Offer multiple sections of a course
3. Eliminate staff reduction
4. Enlarge the curriculum
5. Increase competition among students
6. Allow teachers to remain in their major areas
7. Save money on teacher salaries
8. Save money on expensive equipment

Disadvantages: It will...
1. Require additional cost to put the extra students in the same text book
2. Require additional transportation cost
3. Force teachers in the same building to operate under different contracts
4. Require that the cost of combining programs come out of the existing budget
5. Provide less individual attention for student
6. Make it difficult for students to contact teachers for extra help
7. Cost students time, ex. time loss in commuting on a bus
8. Cause schools to close for consolidation

A CHECK LIST

Stinard (1983) offered the following check list to use before entering into an agreement of sharing, schools should go through a period of examination and preparation. The following guidelines would be helpful in establishing a shared programs.

1. Establish joint planning meetings early
2. Develop clearly written agreements, including finance and responsibilities
3. Provide provisions for termination or withdrawal
4. Insure equitable cost sharing
5. Establish provisions for review, evaluation, and revising
6. Emphasize the educational benefits of sharing
7. If students will be moved, then prepare them motivationally
8. Maintain a talent bank to match staff competency and needs
According to research by Stinard (1983) the two schools of Lisbon and Mount Vernon, Iowa, organized their resources in 1982 because both were offering physics. Mount Vernon's physics enrollment was adequate to sustain the course. But due to a teacher resignation, Lisbon was not able to reassign teachers to cover the area. In a formal meeting in the spring of 1982 the two schools decided they would share the physics class.

Lisbon would send nine students to class in Mount Vernon. With Mount Vernon's eleven students, the class size was a comfortable and cost-effective twenty students.

According to financial arrangements, Lisbon provided for the transportation and paid for one-tenth of the physics teacher's salary.

According to the opinion of J.H. Messerli Superintendent of Schools Lisbon and A.C. Ringold Superintendent of Schools Mount Vernon (personal communications, June 7, 1987) the advantages were far greater than the disadvantages with respect to program sharing. They cited additional financial
support and expanded curriculum as the most positive aspects of sharing. While a lack of control by the administrator and transportation as the two main problems faced during sharing.

An overall perspective of the sharing program has been very positive from both schools.

The school districts of Wilton and Durant have had a nine year history of sharing. They began their cooperation with vocational agriculture in 1975. The schools share shorthand, Spanish, German, and Driver Education.

The cost of transporting students is shared jointly. Durant provides transportation to Wilton for its students, then picks up Wilton students bound for class at a local community college. Wilton transports the students back to Durant.

No money is exchanged because Wilton supplies a vocational agriculture teacher while Durant supplies a German teacher.

The advantages of this sharing according to J.D. Wagner Superintendent of Schools Durant (personal communication June 7, 1987) has been an increase in curriculum offerings by both Durant
and Wilton while also lowering the cost of the offerings.

As in the case of the Lisbon/Mount Vernon program, those involved find sharing a very positive venture.

But according to the research of Powell (1982) the sharing program between Corwith-Wesley and LuVerne takes on a different form. In their agreement the two school districts divided their junior and senior high schools. All 7 - 8 - 9 grade students attend their classes at the LuVerne facility, while all 10 - 11 - 12 grade students attend classes in the Corwith building. This is a total academic sharing, including band and chorus. The boards meet jointly every other month.

Cost of sharing is divided between both schools, both maintaining a facility, faculty, and buses.

D. Sorensen and D.W. Meier Superintendents of Corwith-Wesley and Nashua Schools (personal communications, June 7, 1987) cited the following advantages for sharing; both schools were allowed to expand curriculum offerings while remaining cost effective. Teachers were teaching in their
major or minor areas rather than in an approved area.

But like the others they found transportation and communication as possible disadvantages.

A positive attitude still remains in what might be one of the most innovative sharing programs in Iowa. Teachers, administrators, and students agreed that there were some complications, but they were able to work them out (Powell 1982).

SHARING CO-CURRICULAR PROGRAMS

Although widely used in Iowa but only briefly mentioned was the idea of co-curricular sharing. Many times the sharing of these programs is a means of establishing a line of communication which opens the doors for other types of sharing.

Below is a listing of programs being shared in the state of Iowa today (Pattee 1987).

- **Football**: 41 coop programs
  - involving 85 schools

- **Cross Country**: 14 coop programs
  - involving 29 schools

- **Wrestling**: 30 coop programs
  - involving 62 schools
Swimming 14 coop programs
- involving 14 schools

Track 31 coop programs
- involving 64 schools

Golf 19 coop programs
- involving 39 schools

Tennis 5 coop programs
- involving 10 schools

Baseball 21 coop programs
- involving 42 schools

According to J. Hasek, Board Member Rienbeck Community Schools, (personal communication June 7, 1987) the positive and negative aspects of extra-curricular sharing are numerous. Hasek cited the ability to maintain programs while fielding whole teams as the greatest benefit. She also suggested that teams were more competitive and athletes were playing at an appropriate level. Hasek cited the following disadvantages of sharing athletic programs. (1) Travel time many time detered some students form participating as well as the increased competition of making the team. (2) Many times the communities did not want to lose
the recognition which went with fielding an athletic team.

**IOWA STATE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION POSITION**

As enrollments continue to decline and the number of cooperative programs increase, not all people find sharing as a cure for the dilemma. Instead the Iowa State Education Association (ISEA) took a much different point of view. In fact the ISEA made claim that students will get a "substandard" education in shared districts.

The problem according to the ISEA stems from the fact that teachers may be asked to work in two different districts and be put in the situation of having to work for two different employers, under two different contracts (MacKenzie 1987).

In a statement issued by the ISEA on January 24, 1987 the organization is in favor of legislation which would eliminate state financial incentives for sharing and also make it mandatory that all schools employ full time teachers. Thus eliminating personnel problems because of staff being transferred from one district to another (MacKenzie 1987).
CONCLUSION

After all is said and done and the dust has settled what remains still will not be agreed upon by all of those involved. Is sharing a cure for what is ailing school districts in Iowa? Problems such as declining enrollment, a decline in classes being offered, and a lack of qualified staff to teach the classes.

After reading the material on this subject I feel that sharing indeed may be of value to many of the schools in Iowa. This may be the only alternative to consolidation for the smaller school districts.

It can help those schools who have neighboring districts of comparable size. Sharing can offer students a much larger and more well rounded education without taking away the small school atmosphere.

For those districts who must take into consideration travel time, they may find distance a prohibitive factor in sharing. School districts may have problems not only with transportation cost, but also scheduling may be too restrictive or next to impossible to implement.
Before entering into the shared program many issues must and should be taken into consideration. One thing that I particularly felt was important, but that many districts fail to do, was to have a comprehensive written contract. One which spells out in detail the responsibilities for each school, their administrators, teachers, and students.

Although sharing programs is in its infancy in Iowa, I think that it has come of age. The new standards recently issued by the Department of Education seem to favor the concept of sharing. In many cases the standards are written such that sharing will be the only method by which smaller school districts will be able to survive.

I think that it is time for all of those involved to start working together in an attempt to make this concept work. Granted sharing is not without its flaws, but with the "cooperation" of all it will work for rural Iowa.
References


