
This paper looks at the experiences of five large, impersonal high schools in Boston as they restructure into smaller learning communities. Three years into a district-wide reform effort, the schools provide insight into the opportunities, tensions and challenges faced by large urban high schools as they undertake whole school reform. The authors discuss key findings from the five schools and their implications for reform in other school districts.


This report offers strategies on how to launch and lead a new small school. Ancess describes five components critical to the success of a new small school: vision, organizational structure and perseverance to implement the vision, a committed constituency of staff, students, and parents, a sophisticated understanding of the local education bureaucracy, and financial resources. Also included is a planning guide for launching a new small school.


In 1992 the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) collaborated with the New York City Board of Education and Coalition of Essential Schools (CES), on the Coalition Campus Schools Project (CCSP), an effort to restructure failing high schools into small, autonomous campuses. This report follows up seven years later to find out what has happened to the schools, the campuses, and the students. The report “focuses on six areas: 1) student outcomes, 2) significant school practices, 3) what the campuses look like and how they function, 4) internal and external tensions related to project implementation, 5) CCE’s role in the post-launching phase of the project, and 6) implications for replication” (Ancess and Ort, 9).


This foundation brochure provides information about the current state of high schools and highlights key research on the benefit of small schools for all students.
Among educators and policymakers there is a growing respect for learning that takes place within small schools. This article, featured in a Northwest Education Magazine issue centered on smaller learning communities, considers definitions and examples of smallness, costs associated with downsizing and offers a list of recommended online resources for obtaining additional information on the issue.


In this book, scholars and experts explore some of the major reform issues confronting the American system of public education today. Considerable attention is given to the creation of small, decentralized schools in New York City and Boston. In addition to outlining the seven attributes of successful school systems, the authors provide sources of further information, networking, and technical assistance.


This topical synthesis defines what is meant by "small" schools and presents an overview of the existing research on school size. Research findings repeatedly demonstrate that small schools are superior to large schools on most measures, and equal to them on the remaining measures.


This digest outlines characteristics of the body of research on school size, including research on: feelings and attitudes, social behavior, "why smaller is better", school size and educational equity, and school-within-a-school plans. The author concludes that research in the affective and social spheres affirms the superiority of small-scale schooling.


Cotton provides a comprehensive overview of the recent research on small schools and small learning communities. Particular attention is paid to studies completed in the past five years.
Mounting evidence that big schools are not necessarily better than small schools has inspired educators to find innovative ways to create smaller learning communities. This article profiles large elementary schools in Philadelphia and New York City that educators are transforming into successful small learning communities.


This digest defines the school-within-a-school model, summarizes existing research, and examines advantages and disadvantages. The research literature indicates that implementation of the school-within-a-school model has met with varying success in different settings. It is clear, however, that the most critical factor is commitment to full implementation, allowing the subschool sufficient separateness and autonomy.


Gregory presents his theory of critical anti-mass: creating a high school so small that only an individualized program makes sense in it, a school so small that control is not a central issue and every person has a say in how the school is run.


This report describes four recent forces that have influenced the small schools movement—the information age, the emergence of an adolescent culture, the students' rights movement, and society’s changing view of organizations. Gregory describes the different small school reform models that have emerged, the ideal size for each model, and the implications for reform efforts.


This digest reviews recent research on breaking up large, impersonal high schools and discusses five common errors made in downsizing attempts: errors of autonomy, size, continuity, time, and control. The author also recommends several technical assistance resources to help reformers avoid the errors described.
School Size Research: Reference List


This Digest reviews the results of a series of studies, collectively known as the “Matthew Project,” that examined the relationship between school size, student socioeconomic status, and student achievement. The authors describe the aim of the Matthew Project studies and summarize Project findings. The authors conclude the discussion with a section on implications.


Research findings from a four-state study demonstrate that smaller learning communities can mitigate the damaging effects of poverty on student achievement. State and national result summaries are available at this website.


This digest summarizes recent research on school size, refuting the theory that larger schools have produced greater academic success at lower costs. The research indicates that large schools do not work for minority and low-income students, tend to hinder attendance and student performance, and may have greater operating and per-pupil costs than small schools. School size experts recommend a school enrollment of between 300 to 900 students and that the school-within-a-school model is a crucial first step toward restructuring.


This digest discusses the benefits, drawbacks, varieties, and sources of funding for schools within schools. Designers of schools within schools seek the advantages of both large and small schools by placing students into small learning communities while using the resources of the larger existing facilities. The authors conclude that developing a school within a school requires careful planning by participants.


Patterson High School, a large high school in Baltimore, demonstrates that personalizing relationships and focusing the curriculum can transform an unsafe and chaotic school into a smaller learning community that is conducive to learning. The school adopted the Talent Development Model, which reorganized the school into smaller, self-contained units. The article reports that smaller learning communities result in better student behavior, improved student-teacher relations and increased student achievement.
School Size Research: Reference List


Meier outlines the seven factors that contribute to the success of small school reform: governance, respect, simplicity, safety, parent involvement, accountability, and student belonging.


“Jack and the Giant School” summarizes American school size trends—from small learning communities in the early and mid part of the past century, to the Post World War II shift towards large, comprehensive schools, to rising support for the small schools movement today.


This report presents brief case studies of 22 public school buildings that provide small school environments in shared spaces. The schools represent urban, suburban, and rural communities in 12 states and include both district-run and charter public schools. The case study analysis reveals that on average, smaller schools can provide a safer place for students, a more positive, challenging environment, higher achievement, higher graduation rates, fewer discipline problems, and much greater satisfaction for families, students, and teachers. The analysis also reveals that schools that share facilities with other organizations can offer broader learning opportunities for students, high quality services to students and their families, higher student achievement, better graduation rates, and a way to stretch and make more efficient use of tax dollars.


Raywid reviews the current trend towards downsizing urban schools, noting the ample evidence that small schools benefit the entire school community: teachers, students and parents. This digest is an aid to educators attempting to determine whether and why to pursue downsizing. Small school models, philosophies and future prospects are addressed.
School Size Research: Reference List


This study is derived from an extensive review of the literature and documentation, evaluation, and policy studies of schools-within-schools and small schools. Raywid discusses different downsizing efforts, the reasons for which small schools are being established, and the types of subschools that are being launched (houses, mini-schools, schools-within-schools). Downsizing efforts in three cities, New York, Philadelphia and Chicago are highlighted. Raywid concludes that downsizing can increase student participation, reduce dropouts, improve achievement, and enhance teacher efficacy.


Numerous case studies provide reliable evidence that small schools lead to improved student achievement. In addition to the effects of small schools on student achievement, large-scale research suggests that small schools are less violent and that bonds created in small schools are likely to influence students' personal habits, aspirations and post-high-school behavior. Small school success is attributed to the following factors: the more human scale of such schools, more committed teachers, coherent mission, and relative autonomy.


This digest begins with an overview of the large-scale quantitative studies on the productiveness and effectiveness of small schools. It then covers new directions in small schools research, including associated policy issues, individual success and failures, and essential elements and other implementation considerations. School reform literature that interweaves school size with other reform issues is also addressed.


A challenge facing small high schools is their ability to support a broad and diverse curriculum. This digest presents evidence illustrating that many small high schools maintain curricula and programs comparable in quality to those offered at larger schools. Three components of attaining curriculum adequacy through high school restructuring are identified: a common academic curriculum, high academic standards and authentic instruction.
School Size Research: Reference List


“This background paper is designed to help policymakers and school leaders use the new Smaller Learning Communities program to implement small school strategies in large high schools and within school districts. The paper describes the federal initiative, highlights small school structures and strategies that may be implemented with grant funds, reviews the context of the growing consensus around smaller schools, and summarizes the research that undergirds the new grant program” (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).


Report findings are based on a two-year study of 150 small schools established in Chicago between 1990 and 1997. Researchers discovered that students in these small schools exhibited increased academic achievement, decreased dropout rates and lower levels of violence.


This policy brief provides a review of the literature on small school research, with an emphasis on recent studies and meta-analyses (1990-present) regarding school size and school-within-a-school (SWAS) models.