

Staying in Touch

News from the Center for School Change in Rural Minnesota

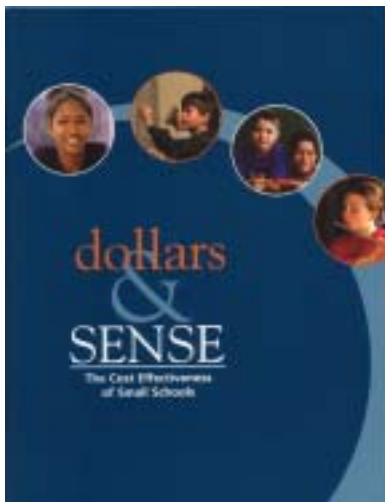
Nov. 2002



Small schools increase benefits for students — not necessarily costs!

When it comes to school size, research indicates that small schools often perform better than large schools. Graduation rates, achievement and teacher satisfaction tend to be higher in small schools, while dropout numbers and numbers of discipline problems are lower.

Nonetheless, there is a long-standing perception that small schools are too costly to build and operate. A



common argument for consolidation in rural districts is the idea that maintaining one large school is more cost effective than operating two or more smaller ones.

A recent report, *Dollars and Sense: The Cost Effectiveness*

of Small Schools, questions the "economy of scale" concept, and gives evidence that small schools (on average, small schools have fewer than 300 students while large schools have more than 1,000) are not only better for kids but affordable as well. Their arguments fall into several categories.

- ▶ Authors of the report suggest that high dropout rates in large schools may create long term costs for society since dropouts are likely to earn less than graduates and need more in the form of public assistance.
 - ▶ Very large schools require salaries for extra layers of administrators as well as more security and maintenance personnel than small schools. Large schools are likely to have more vandalism than small schools, at least in part, because students do not feel as connected to classmates and teachers as they do in small schools.
 - ▶ Getting students to centrally located schools increases costs in both
- Continued on back ...*

Helpful Resources

The Minnesota Parent Center (MPC), is a state-wide project that supports students by helping families and schools build strong ties. This fall, the program worked with the Center for School Change to co-sponsor locally planned parent involvement events in communities throughout the state.

The project also offers free information and assistance to educators as well as parents of all school-age children. A current list of workshop titles includes: *Parent Involvement at Home and School*, *Conferences for Parents*, *Family Friendly Conferences for Educational Professionals*, *Record Keeping*, *Advocating for Professionals*, *Advocating for Your Child (parents)*, *Understanding Cultural Diversity*, *Bullying and Truancy*.

For additional information about MPC programs, visit the project's Web site at www.pacer.org/mpc or call 800-537-2237.

Fishing for History

Teachers at the Minnesota Center, a year-round middle school in the Cambridge-Isanti School District, created a fishing game as a way to help students think about Minnesota history.

Materials Needed



A plastic foam minnow bucket



A child's fishing pole, or ice fishing pole with a magnet tied to the end of the line



About 30 paper fish with paper clips attached

At the Minnesota Center, teachers wrote history questions on the paper fish, and then put the fish into the minnow bucket. Students were selected to go fishing on a random basis. Depending on the fishing laws in effect, students might either answer the question or ask for responses from others in the classroom.

Minnesota Center teacher Gary Hawkins said the game is both a great motivational tool and fun! Teachers have adapted it for many subjects at school and used it at presentations to outside groups.

Small schools ...

transportation dollars and students' time.

The report also looks at building costs for new schools based on data collected from 489 sites submitted to school design competitions. While there can be significant construction cost differences between very small and very large schools, writers found evidence that small schools can be cost effective to build.

For a free copy of *Dollars and Sense*, call Knowledge Works Foundation (515-929-1122) or the Rural School and Community Trust (202-955-7177). Concordia, a planning and architectural design firm, was a third partner in preparation of the report.

Published by the Center for School Change in Rural Minnesota, *Staying in Touch* provides a monthly connection between CSC and rural school sites. Material is prepared for publication by rural outreach coordinators Terri Anderson and Vicki Nelson. Copies are available by mail or at the CSC Web site, www.centerforschoolchange.org. Please send comments or questions to Vicki Nelson at 37848 Deer Lake Way, Grand Rapids, MN 55744 or vickinel@lcp2.net.

The University of Minnesota is committed to the policy that all persons shall have equal access to its programs, facilities and employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status or sexual orientation.

The Center for School Change in Rural Minnesota
A Project of the Center for School Change
HHH Institute of Public Affairs - U. of Minnesota
301 Nineteenth Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55455

www.centerforschoolchange.org