

## District Consolidation: What Does The Research Say?

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### National Consolidation Data

- In 1937 there were 119,001 school districts in the US and a movement began to consolidate school districts.
- In 1970 there were 17,995 school districts remaining in the country.
- In 1996, there were 14,841 school districts.
- In 2012 there were 13,588 school districts.

- There has been no appreciable change since 2007 and there is not currently a nationwide movement to consolidate districts.
- In 2003- Dr. Harry Miley, Chief Economist of the S.C. Board of Economic Advisors, studied district and school organization, size , demographics and fiscal efficiency and academic impact.
- The study was contracted by the SCEOC and is available on their website.

***School District Organization in  
South Carolina:  
Evaluating Performance and Fiscal  
Efficiency***

Prepared for  
The Education Oversight Committee  
Miley and Associates January 2003

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## Changes in Districts

Table 1  
Changes in Number of School Districts

Year	No. Districts	Largest ADM	Smallest ADM	Average ADM	Ave. Exp. Per Pupil	Highest Exp. Per Pupil	Lowest Exp. Per Pupil
1950	1,220	36,578	2,398	412	\$117	\$151	\$80
1960	108	42,489	371	4,920	\$179	\$261	\$121
1970	95	53,174	442	6,319	\$508	\$629	\$366
1980	92	52,042	525	6,596	\$1,381	\$1,812	\$1,042
1990	91	50,620	576	6,757	\$3,788	\$5,045	\$3,187
2000	86	58,019	443	7,539			

Source: State Superintendents Annual Report

## History of District and School Consolidation in Spartanburg County

<u>YEAR</u>	<u># DISTRICTS</u>	<u># SCHOOLS</u>	<u># STUDENTS</u>
49 – 50	96	177	31,807
50 – 51	95	177	31,567
51 – 52	12	121	31,882
52 – 53	7	110	32,291
64 – 65	7	90	39,015
97 – 98	7	64	40,403
05 – 06	7	74	44,499
15 – 16	7	69	47,149

## Comparison

Table 5

Comparison of Number of Districts by Size for SC and US

District size	Percentage of districts		Percentage of students	
	US	SC	US	SC
25,000 or more	1.7	5.9	32.1	27.8
10,000-24,999	4.0	15.3	18.7	29.4
7,500-9,999	2.2	14.1	6.0	16.2
5,000-7,499	4.9	10.6	9.4	8.3
2,500-4,999	14.2	27.0	15.6	12.8
1,500-2,499	13.0	10.6	8.0	2.9
1-1,499	60.0	16.5	10.2	2.6

## Enrollment Comparisons -2005-2006

District Enrollment	US Districts	US Percent	SC Districts	SC Percent	Sptbg. County Districts
	14,199		85		7
100,000	26	0.018	85	0	0
			0		
10,000-99,999	869	6.1	20	23.5	2
5,000-9,999	1,067	7.5	20	23.5	3
3,000-4,999	1,423	10.0	17	20.0	
1,000-2,999	3,927	27.7	24	28.2	2
500-999	2,330	16.4	4	4.7	
300-499	1,333	9.4	0	0	
100-299	1,826	12.9	0	0	
1-99	1,031	7.3	0	0	
<b>Average</b>	<b>3,382</b>		<b>8,224</b>		<b>6,295</b>

**NOTE-83.7% of all districts in the US have less than 5,000 students while the average total enrollment for districts is 3,382. In 2011 the % was 84.7**

Source: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2006> and <http://ed.sc.gov>

## Spartanburg County Enrollments

**EVERY SPARTANBURG DISTRICT APPROXIMATES OR EXCEEDS THE NATIONAL AVERAGE SIZE DISTRICT(2016).**

<u>DISTRICT</u>	<u>ENROLLMENT</u>
DISTRICT 1	5027
DISTRICT 2	10027
DISTRICT 3	2904
DISTRICT 4	2835
DISTRICT 5	8179
DISTRICT 6	11122
DISTRICT 7	7054

### Size and Performance High Schools

Expanded analysis: District size does affect  
Performance

For High Schools:

“...for South Carolina high schools, smaller school districts are more conducive to student achievement for schools containing low socioeconomic students or high poverty index values, while larger districts generate higher achievement levels for schools with low poverty levels.”

## Middle Schools Findings-Miley

- Small schools in poor districts and large schools in more well to do districts tend to have a positive impact on school performance.
- Schools with high poverty tend to perform better in small districts while schools with less poverty do better in larger school districts.
- For middle schools, the impact of school or district size on student performance depends upon the socioeconomic status of the student being served.

## Findings for Elementary Schools

No relationship was found among the variables of size, socioeconomic status, and student performance.

## School District Size and Financial Efficiency

- "...in general larger districts operate at lower

Table 20

Group	Number	Average Size	Average Per Pupil Expenditures	Ratio to State Average
25,000->	5	36,103	\$6,345	1.001
15,000-24,999	6	17,506	\$5,921	.934
10,000-14,999	7	12,227	\$6,316	.996
5,000-9,999	21	7,570	\$6,383	1.007
2,500-4,999	23	3,642	\$6,477	1.017
0 - 2,499	24	1,478	\$7,062	1.114
State Total	86	7,551	\$6,338	1.000

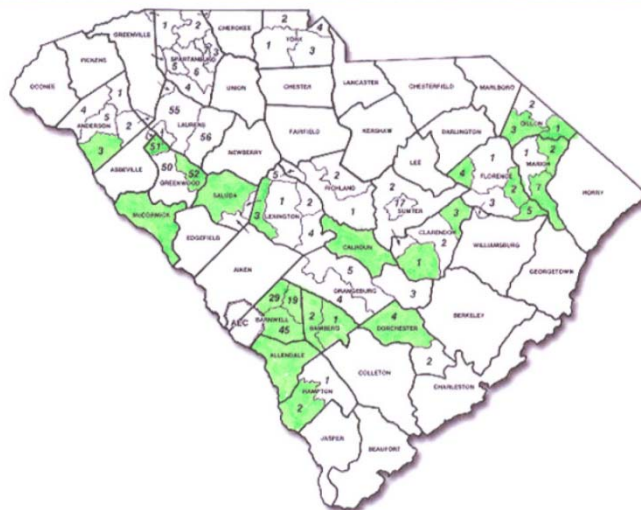
"...at some point, the gains in efficiency due to economies of scale may disappear and in fact, reverse themselves."

### PER PUPIL EXPENDITURES FOR SPARTANBURG DISTRICTS LESS THAN SEVERAL LARGER COUNTY-WIDE SYSTEMS(FY12-13)

<i>District</i>	<i>Students</i>	<i>Per-Pupil Expenditures</i>
Berkeley	30,034	\$ 8,265
Beaufort	20,110	\$ 10,502
Charleston	43,977	\$ 9,304
Darlington	10,362	\$ 8,726
Horry	39,037	\$ 10,070
Kershaw	10,332	\$ 8,617
Oconee	10,535	\$ 10,120
Average	25,560	\$ 8,952
Spartanburg	46,567	\$ 8,774
		\$ (177)

## EOC Study-other findings

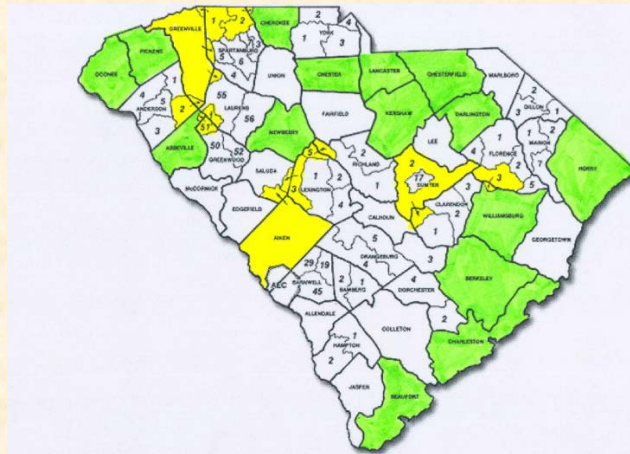
- If the school districts of the state could be combined to yield no districts less than 2,500 pupils, and their costs equal the state average, the State could save \$25,688,968.
- This sum of money, however, represented less than one percent (.6%) of the state educational costs in 2003.
- In 2008, this finding was “mistakenly” reported by some legislators as the amount of savings possible from consolidating to county school systems.



Districts with less than 2500 students.



## County Model Consolidation Proposal



County Wide Districts Plus Overlapping Districts

- > Yellow Signifies Overlapping Districts
- > Green Signifies Countywide Districts

- Spartanburg communities oppose consolidation- the current system combines the best features of unconsolidated and consolidated districts.
  - Decision making closest to the people.
  - County wide planning, policy development, and partnerships among our districts.
  - Multi-district programs for cost savings and innovations.
  - Vigorous competition.

## Final Miley Recommendation

- Any proposals designed to reduce operational costs through consolidation of small districts needs to be carefully evaluated to ensure there are no indirect impacts on performance(achievement) and increased transportation costs.
- Avoid one size-fits-all policies for consolidation which would meet with limited success.

### Legislative Audit Council Report to the General Assembly September 2004-Efficiency and Accountability Relating to School Districts

- South Carolina's school districts are relatively consolidated compared to those in other states.
- In 1999-2000, South Carolina's median district size (4,367 pupils) ranked 5<sup>th</sup> among the states.
- It's average district size (7,753 pupils) ranked 10<sup>th</sup> largest in the nation.

- The 20 smallest districts in the state are more likely to rank in the top 20 for cost per pupil for operations.
- Some small districts, however, have been able to keep their costs down.
- Recent South Carolina school district consolidations do not offer conclusive evidence that consolidation reduces costs.
- Nationwide, other studies found evidence that students from lower socio-economic groups perform better in smaller schools and/or districts.
- Consolidations might be more successful if undertaken on a case by case basis, with community support and identified benefits.

## Second EOC Study: 2005

Unconsolidated districts are often more cost effective than county units.

- Only 50 % of the county wide districts spend less than the state average per pupil.
- 70% of the unconsolidated counties, however, spend less than the state average.
- 71% of the unconsolidated districts spend less than the state average for administrative expenses.

## Unconsolidated districts produce higher student success as evidenced through

- Higher State Report Card and NCLB ratings
- Higher percentage of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students taking Advanced Placement courses, qualifying for Life Scholarships and passing the State Exit Exam on the first attempt.
- Higher percentage of 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students taking high school courses.
- Lower dropout rates.
- Higher percentages of teachers with advanced degrees.

## Findings from Louisiana(2008) Forced consolidations failed.

<http://www.louisianaschools.net/1de/uploads/3475/pdf>

- In all states, proposed consolidation of school districts is almost always driven by the notion that there will be huge cost savings.
- Because district consolidation produces minimal cost savings, school consolidations often follow.
- Students in consolidated schools have longer bus rides, fragmented attendance zones and alienation.
- These students have fewer extra-curricular opportunities and lower parent participation.

## Forced Consolidation (continued)

- Not surprisingly, consolidated schools have higher dropout rates.
- School closings hurt the social and economic health of communities.
- The loss of neighborhood schools triggers population decline, less community involvement and lower support for schools.

## Forced Consolidation (con't.)

- There is no solid foundation for the belief that elimination of school districts will improve education, enhance cost effectiveness, or promote greater equality.
- except for extraordinary circumstances, district reorganization should be a voluntary decision of local voters and school boards.
- Disputes on consolidations may be costly diversions from the more important issues of disadvantage and equal opportunity, especially as they relate to school performance.

## CONSOLIDATION OF SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS: WHAT THE NATIONAL RESEARCH SAYS (2012)

- Question claims about presumed benefits of consolidation given that current research suggests that savings for taxpayers, fiscal efficiencies, and curricular improvements are unlikely.
- Avoid statewide mandates for consolidation and steer clear of minimum sizes for schools and districts. These always prove arbitrary and often prove unworkable.
- Consider other measures to improve fiscal efficiency. e.g. cooperative agreements among districts, combined financial services, Educational Service Agencies (consortiums), state regulations addressing the needs of small districts and schools etc.

- Claims for educational benefits from systematic statewide school and district consolidation are overestimated and have already been maximized.
- Impoverished places, in particular, often benefit from smaller schools and districts, and can suffer irreversible damage if consolidation occurs.
- Many schools that are too large often result in diminished academic and social performance.
- Investigate deconsolidation as a means of improving fiscal efficiency and learning outcomes.
- State-level consolidation proposals appear to serve a public relations purpose in times of fiscal crisis, rather than substantive fiscal or educational purposes.

- The industrial benefits of larger scale were likely fully achieved during the 20th century. Remaining efficiencies from consolidation are not systemic, but spotty and marginal: the cost-benefit ratio is at best doubtful.
- The 20th century's extensive consolidation has likely gone too far and has likely violated efficiency requirements, thereby producing widespread diseconomies of scale.
- Consolidation reforms were driven by a state policy focus on inputs. Today the reform agenda is focused on higher test scores—and consolidation appears to be a very unlikely contributor (and more probably an impediment) to improved outcomes.

## District Consolidation in Mississippi 2016

- Consolidated districts often add more mid-level managers because consolidation often yields more schools for a central office to manage.
- Consolidation has resulted in increased transportation costs, as well as capital construction to accommodate students.
- Some research has found consolidation to negatively impact housing prices, particularly when the local community views consolidation as a loss of ownership or control.

## District Consolidation in Mississippi 2016

Many larger schools have:

- reduced rates of student participation in extracurricular activities,
- Less safe school environments,
- lower graduation rates,
- lower achievement levels for impoverished students, and
- larger achievement gaps related to poverty, race, and gender.

- In rural areas. the loss of a school can erode a community's social and economic base. Parents in consolidated districts perceive fewer opportunities to be involved in their children's education.
- This disconnect is often associated with increased travel time or governance structures outside of the local community.
- Of particular relevance to Mississippi, research suggests that impoverished areas usually benefit from smaller schools



## Forced District Consolidation in South Carolina?

- Where is the solid, indisputable evidence that this action will benefit children? The recent “efficiency reviews” did not evaluate indicators of student achievement .
- Where is the hard evidence that it would save money? Based on my considerable experience evaluating districts, I think the recent “reviews” in S. C. were conducted too rapidly to provide adequate evidence for such action.
- South Carolina studies ,and more recent research in others states, challenge the cost savings predictions.